# Required Screening

Fifteen Must-See Films for the Art-House Connoisseur, 1924–1980

R. J. CARDULLO

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# "The Film's the Thing"

## THE FILM EXPERIENCE

Film editing, or the instantaneous replacement of one moving visual field with another, was once not part of our daily experience. So nothing in 400 million years of vertebrate evolution prepared us for the visual assault of cinema. But amazingly enough, the process succeeded and we became accommodated to the idea of motion pictures. Even more, a mysterious extra meaning was gained from the juxtaposition of two images that was not present in either of the shots themselves. In short, we discovered that the human mind was predisposed to cinematic grammar as if it were an entirely natural, inborn language. Perhaps it is inborn, because we spend one-third of our lives in the nightly world of dreams. There, images are fragmented and different realities collide abruptly with what seems to have great meaning. In this way we can see film editing as, probably unwittingly, employing the power and means of dream.

For many millions of years, then, human beings were apparently carrying within them the ability to respond to film and were unconsciously awaiting its arrival in order to employ their dream-faculty more fully. Some of us have long believed that, through more recent centuries, theater artists and audiences themselves had also been longing for the film to be invented even without a clue that there could be such a medium. Many tricks of stagecraft in those centuries (particularly the nineteenth) were, without knowing it, attempting to be cross-cuts and superimpositions, or double exposures. Some dramatists even imagined their work in forms and perspectives that anticipated the birth of the cinema (most notably, and excitingly, Georg Büchner in *Danton's Death* [1835]). In his essay "Dickens, Griffith, and the Film Today" (1944), Sergei Eisenstein shows how the novel itself—specifically, the novels of Charles Dickens—provided D. W. Griffith with a number of cinematic techniques, including equivalents to fades, dissolves, the breakdown into shots, and the concept of parallel editing. These novelistic and theatrical attempts at prognostication a few centuries earlier are puny stuff, though, because for millions of years homo sapiens had been subliminally prepared for the intricacies of film, had indeed been getting ready for them every night. Indeed, in a sense the last century, the mere centenary of film's existence, was the emotional and psychological goal of the ages—and continues to be into the twenty-first century.

When the first moving picture flashed onto a screen, the double life of all human beings thus became intensified. That double life consists, on the one hand, of actions and words and surfaces, and, on the other, of secrets and self-knowledges or self-ignorances, self-ignorings. That double life has been part of man's existence ever

since art and religion were invented to make sure that he became aware of it. In the past 150 years or so, religion has receded further and further as revealer of that double life, and art has taken over more and more of the function; when film art came along, it made that revelation of doubleness inescapable, in fact more attractive. To wit: on the screen are facts, which at the same time are symbols; for this reason, they invoke doubleness at every moment, in every kind of picture. They stir up the concealments in our lives, both those concealments we like and those we do not like; they shake our histories, our hopes, and our heartbreaks into consciousness. Not completely, by any means. (Who could stand it?) And not more grandly or deeply than do the other arts. But more quickly and surely, because these facts, these symbols do their stirring and shaking with visuals as well as with motion, serially and cumulatively.

Think of this process as applying to every frame of film and it is clear that when we sit before a screen, we run risks unprecedented in human history. A poem may or may not touch us; a play or novel may never get near us. But movies are inescapable. (In the case of poor films, we often have the sensation of fighting our way *out* of them.) When two screen lovers kiss, in any picture, that kiss has a minimum inescapability that is stronger than in other arts—both as an action before us and a metaphor for the "kissingness" in our own lives. Each of us is pinned privately to such a kiss in some degree of pleasure or pain or enlightenment. In romances or tragedies, in period films or modern dramas, in musical comedies or historical epics, in Westerns or farces, our beings—kissing or otherwise—are in some measure summoned up before us, in our own private visions. And I would like to suggest that the fundamental way, conscious or not, in which we determine the quality of a film is by the degree to which the re-experiencing of ourselves coincides with our pride, our shames, our hopes, our honor.

Finally, it follows, distinctions among movies arise from the way they please or displease us with ourselves: not *whether* they please or displease but *how*. This is true, I believe, in every art today; it is not a cinema monopoly. But in the cinema it has become more true more swiftly and decisively because film has a much smaller heritage of received aesthetics to reassess; because film is bound more closely to the future than other arts seem to be (the reason is that, by its very episodic or "journeying" form, film reflects for viewers the belief that the world is a place in which man can leave the past behind and create his own future); and because film confronts us so immediately, so seductively, and so shockingly (especially on the larger-than-life screen) with at least some of the truth about what we have been doing with ourselves. To the extent that film exposes the viewer to this truth about himself, in his experience of the world or of fantasy, in his options for action or for privacy, to the extent that he can thus accept a film as worthy of himself or better than himself— to that extent a film is necessary to him. And it is that necessity, I am arguing, that ultimately sets its value.

Throughout history, two factors have formed people's taste in any art, their valuing of it, that is: knowledge of that art and knowledge of life. Obviously this is still true, but the function of taste seems to be altering. As formalist aesthetic canons have come to seem less and less tenable, standards in art and life have become more and more congruent, and as a result the function of taste is increasingly the selection

and appraisal of the works that are most valuable—and most necessary—to the individual's very existence. So our means for evaluating films naturally become more and more involved with our means for evaluating experience; aesthetic standards do not become identical with standards in life but they are certainly related—and, one hopes, somewhat braver.

Of course the whole process means that human beings feed on themselves, on their own lives variously rearranged by art, as a source of values. But despite other prevalent beliefs about the past connected with theology and religion, we are coming to see that people have always been the source of their own values. In the century in which this responsibility, this liberation, became increasingly apparent—the twentieth—the intellect of man simultaneously provided a new art form, the film, to make the most of it.

That art form is obviously still with us, and now, in the twenty-first century, more than ever, it seems. And its critics proliferate in number, in part because of what I describe above: the "personal" element involved in the watching of any movie, and the ease nowadays with which, through the Internet, one can communicate that personal response to others. If, as Oscar Wilde once said, "The highest form of criticism is a mode of autobiography" (48)—because only by "intensifying his own personality" could the critic interpret the personality and work of others—then film criticism must be an even higher form.

## THE CRITIC AS HUMANIST

As the highest form of autobiography, such criticism is necessarily humanistic in its approach. That approach sees films as an art like other arts, and film criticism as a human activity practiced by the educated, cultured person. Like the classical humanism of the Renaissance, such criticism asserts the dignity and worth of individuals and their capacity for self-realization, in this instance through the application of reason as well as feeling to the activity (followed by the recollection) of watching a movie. Thus the humanistic approach to cinema attempts to make sense of the individual's emotional and intellectual, *personal* experience of a film, to draw conclusions about the value of that experience, and to communicate that value to others.

Seeing in film, then, the same potential for art that countless generations have traditionally found in painting, music, and literature—the kind of art that lifts the human spirit and stimulates the human mind—the humanist film critic looks for a similar aesthetic experience in the movies. What can movies tell us about the human condition? How do they reflect an intellectual interest in politics, religion, history, or philosophy? What kinds of ideas are hidden beneath the surface of a film? How can we interpret its symbols? How do form and content interact to convey the filmmaker's meaning? Is there an artist behind the creation of a film? What relationship exists between this particular film or this genre of film and the world outside the movie theater? How shall we rank the quality of this motion picture compared to some ideal excellence or compared to the best cinema that has been produced in the past? These

questions are familiar, for they are the same ones asked of any art form. They are not specific to film, but specific to aesthetic inquiry in general.

Because of the interest in film criticism displayed by people from a wide variety of fields, the humanistic approach presupposes that writer and reader have a certain familiarity with the general principles of aesthetic inquiry as articulated by Western culture from the time of the Greeks to the present. Film is simply assumed to be of the same order as other art forms and, therefore, subject to similar investigation. This was not always the case for the cinema, of course, because traditional definitions of art imply a high moral purpose and a complex aesthetic scheme. Art has always been defined as something qualitatively different from entertainment, in other words, and most commentators, at least in the United States, saw movies as nothing more than entertainment until after World War II.

W. R. Robinson, writing in the late 1960s, exemplifies the change of view that had taken place and that still characterizes the way in which the intellectual community looks at film. He justifies critical inquiry into movies by suggesting that they make the same appeal to the spectator as do the other arts, an assertion that also implies that the spectator is a cultured individual familiar with such appeals. Robinson states that a movie engages the viewer in a moral and aesthetic dialogue that demands some sort of response, even if only to decide whether the movie was worth attending in the first place:

> In short, everyone instinctively recognizes that a movie—all art, in fact— invites him to exercise his taste in making a value judgment. He senses that a value assertion has been made and that a reply is demanded of him. And except for the most diffident, everybody also senses that he is qualified to reply. (119)

Surely everyone seeing a film will make that first value judgment, even if it is based only on immediate emotional grounds; the humanist simply goes further, probing more deeply into those initial responses, recognizing the potential for moral and intellectual interchange.

The humanist, then, is largely self-defined, and perhaps is simply a person who takes an interest in the subject at hand—here, film. A general knowledge of literature, drama, and the fine arts will help him to indulge that interest, to relate the cinematic experience to other artistic experiences. For the humanist, critical investigation into, intellectual curiosity about, and logical analysis of all aspects of experience, inside as well as outside the artwork, are habitual responses to life. Looking closely at the filmic experience, trying to discern there the mark of human excellence or potential, is no different from looking closely at the experience of reading novels, viewing paintings, or listening to music. The humanist seeks to understand human nature and mankind's place in the scheme of things, asking such traditional questions as "Who are we?" and "What is life all about?"

As Robert Richardson has pointed out, the answers to these questions may be found in movies:

> Perhaps man is no longer the measure of all things, but man remains the measure of the world on film. The films of Jean Renoir, for example, show just this emphasis on the desirability of being human; it is the main theme of *Grand Illusion* and of other films. *La strada*, revolving around three people whom psychology would call abnormal, nevertheless manages to find and then insist on humanness in the animal Zampanò, in the half-wit Gelsomina, and in the Fool. The film has the pace and power of a Greek tragedy; its theme, like that of Sophocles' *Ajax*, might be said to be an examination of what it is to be human. (128–129)

The humanist, finally, looks for representations in film of general human values, the truths of human experience as they relate to the common or universal aspects of existence: birth, death, love, aggression, happiness, sorrow. He seeks an answer to the question, "What is there in this film or in my experience of it that will help me understand the variety and complexity of the human heart and mind?" Finding out more about a particular film, a genre, a director's concerns and interests, or the influences of society on the production of movies—all of these can make the moviegoing experience more meaningful, and all of them make up the province of the humanistic critic and his readers. It is only such an alchemy of the mind that can enlarge or expand the merely physical and emotional sensation of watching shadows in the dark.

## THE HISTORY OF FILM FOR CULTURED AUDIENCES

By the time the movies became a reality, at the end of the nineteenth century, the intellectual community had clearly demarcated the differences between highbrow and lowbrow art, between artworks seriously aimed at discerning audiences and those aimed at the unwashed masses. Movies were popular entertainment similar in form and function to dime novels, circuses, and the music hall, and thus were not worth either experiencing or commenting upon as far as intellectuals were concerned. Nevertheless, over the years, there appeared a few cultured individuals who found in the movies something of human relevance for the discerning mind.

Vachel Lindsay, an American poet, in 1915 wrote a book-length study, *The Art of the Moving Picture*, in which he attempted to distinguish the properties of film from those of other arts and to synthesize the properties of other arts within the one art of cinema. In the following year, Hugo Münsterberg, an eminent psychologist on the faculty at Harvard, explored the psychological relationship between the film viewer and the screen image in his book *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study*. Writing near the very beginning of the history of motion pictures, Münsterberg was aware of the way in which early films recorded the activities of the world in front of the camera, thereby performing an educational or instructional, descriptive function. But he makes an excellent case for the position that the motion picture's greatest strength lies in its

ability to portray human emotion. "To picture emotions must be the central aim of the photoplay" (48), writes Münsterberg. He also goes on to suggest that, as in some of the other arts, the representation of the human heart and mind on film successfully raises moral issues; for him, film narrative presents the opportunity for making moral judgments, both on the part of the moviemaker and of the audience. The truth of the representation must be tested against the truth of the viewer's own experience of the world.

Though, in one sense, these early books by a poet and a psychologist might be classed as works of film theory rather than as evaluations of specific films, they were both written by cultured individuals who were not primarily film scholars or critics. And both felt compelled to argue that, despite continued neglect by the intellectual community, the cinema deserved a place alongside the time-honored arts of literature, music, and painting. For the most part, Lindsay's and Münsterberg's rhetoric failed to convince their peers—at least in the United States. In Europe, on the other hand, intellectuals had been attracted to filmmaking from the birth of the medium. (France, for example, had initiated the extensive filming of classic plays and novels well before the First World War.) So it is not surprising that all over Europe—in Paris, Berlin, Moscow—during the 1920s, intellectuals and artists talked and wrote about the movies as the equivalent of the other arts. Between the world wars in America, however, intellectuals scarcely noted the existence of the medium. There were, of course, some thoughtful reviews of specific films in major periodicals by critics more commonly given to writing about high-class literature. Edmund Wilson, Aldous Huxley, and Robert E. Sherwood were among the few who did not condescend when they occasionally wrote about the films of the 1920s and 1930s.

Other reviewers who wrote regularly about specific films from the 1930s through the 1950s, in magazines intended for a cultured readership, and who accepted the film as worthy of intellectual scrutiny, included Harry Alan Potamkin, Otis Ferguson, Robert Warshow, and James Agee. These writers, though clearly identifiable under the title "reviewers," also wrote what can be considered humanistic criticism, since their perceptions about film included thoughtful references to contemporary ideas in psychology, sociology, politics, and aesthetics that would be understood by a cultured audience. They did not simply recount the plot of a film and say whether they liked it or not, but went further in trying to relate their experiences of individual movies to the intellectual concerns of the day. (Robert Warshow, for example, in his 1954 essay titled "The Westerner," about the hero of western movies, as well as in his 1948 piece "The Gangster as Tragic Hero," discusses not simply a number of films, but also the American fascination with violence.)

Nevertheless, the intellectual community as a whole did not make film one of its concerns until after the Second World War. In part because of the pressure of returning veterans, some of whom had seen non-Hollywood films while stationed abroad, and in part because of an increase in experimental or avant-garde filmmaking by members of the art community who were working in academic departments, film societies sprang up on college campuses all over the U.S. In addition to providing inexpensive entertainment to students making do on the G.I. Bill, the film societies introduced Americans to foreign films like those from Italy, which attempted to treat

postwar problems realistically, to present life as it was lived and not as it was dramatized or glamorized in the well-known, predictable genres of most Hollywood films. The experience of watching such movies invited more organization on the part of film societies, and soon more or less random exposure to the classics of world cinema, whether they were silents or sound pictures, became codified into college courses.

The result was that by the late 1950s and early 1960s, a large number of college-educated Americans had come to realize that movies existed which were not simply escapist entertainment, but which held possibilities for human enrichment similar to the possibilities offered by the more traditional arts of drama, painting, and literature. The early films of Ingmar Bergman (e.g., *The Seventh Seal*, 1957) and Federico Fellini (e.g., *La strada*, 1954) were the first to be reviewed and praised by highbrow critics in prestigious journals. The first films of the French New Wave—François Truffaut's *The 400 Blows*, Jean-Luc Godard's *Breathless*, and Alain Resnais's *Hiroshima, mon amour*—won prizes at Cannes in 1959. Anyone who claimed to be an intellectual, a cultured individual who was aware of the artistic trends in contemporary life, had to see these pictures. A circuit of art-house movie theaters eventually appeared that featured such films, which were distributed all over the country. People came not to forget their cares, as they did at Hollywood movies, but to think about the difficulties and problems of living in the nuclear age.

And a lively and informed criticism of these movies began to appear in print, not only in intellectual magazines like *The Nation* and *The New Republic* but also in hundreds of highly literate books by writers from a wide variety of disciplines, as the intellectual community sought to map out this new area of study. In the early 1970s, moreover, several universities began to sponsor new journals devoted to a wide-ranging, widely practiced exploration of the cinema, such as *Film Heritage* and *Literature/Film Quarterly*. During the late 1970s and well into the 1980s, however, as film studies in the academic world became more specialized and thereby "legitimized," evolving on many campuses into doctorate-granting departments, fewer and fewer writers from other disciplines felt comfortable about making the crossover into movie criticism.

Nonetheless, the humanistic approach is still alive and well anywhere and any time so-called generalists, however few in number, decide to analyze movies. In addition, one cannot forget the thriving interest in humanist film criticism registered by the countless number of students in introductory and advanced film classes who write papers. For the most part, these students are also generalists, familiar with the terms of humanist inquiry. Their speculations and intuitions about film topics, as any film teacher can attest, are often as eye-opening and enlightening as those of any professional academic. *All* students should be encouraged to realize that they might, upon careful reflection, produce a perception about the cinema that is highly original—and very good.

## THE PERSONAL ESSAY AND THE PLEASURES OF INTUITIVE INTERPRETATION

The humanistic approach to film criticism is thus open to all. It requires only a general background in the arts, the experience of filmgoing, and the habit of reading and writing. It presupposes that criticism—looking rationally and sympathetically at the world in an attempt to understand it and its inhabitants better—is an important human function. At the same time, criticism confers more than simply understanding on its practitioners: it also gives great pleasure, the very human pleasure of discovering something about a film that is new and original. This pleasure occurs during the critical act itself, when a person sits down to organize into written form the vague and ephemeral impressions of the actual experience of moviegoing. Such writing is hard work and doesn't always reach the highest level; great thoughts and insights don't always come. Still, something about the concentration necessary for writing can coalesce and distill distinct ideas and feelings into substantial critical discourse.

The first step for the potential writer, of course, is to think of films as something more than mere escapist entertainment for a mass audience, and simultaneously to draw the conclusion that more than a cursory glance at the movies can yield intellectual satisfactions. From this perspective, the humanist critic can find significant perceptions to express not only about the manifestly complex films made by foreign filmmakers, but also about mainstream movies as well. The important point is that humanists look inward, examining their own responses in more than a cursory way, and try to understand what it was that produced their initial reaction to the picture in question. People usually know whether they liked or disliked a particular movie; but the humanist is not satisfied by such simplistic response: he wants to know precisely why he liked or disliked the work. What was it, in particular, that made the film good or bad? Or what made the film so boring, pretentious, thrilling, saddening, hysterical, or rewarding? The humanist trusts intuition first, then tries rationally to elaborate the reasons why he intuitively responded in this or that way. It is the very articulate sharing of his responses to the cinema on a cultivated level that distinguishes the humanist film critic from the mere movie reviewer.

Paul Ricoeur, a noted French philosopher, has described the process of the critic's immersion in a text, cinematic or otherwise, as a movement through three stages. The first he calls "understanding" (71ff.), the moment when a text makes its power clear to the person experiencing it. Having seen a particular film, for example, the viewer is struck by the insistence with which it urges itself on his own life. We are all aware that some films do not have such an appeal; we see them, pass the time, and forget about them. When this recognition of insistence or pertinence does take place, however, the text demands some "explanation." This is Ricoeur's second stage. Dudley Andrew, in *Concepts of Film Theory* (1984), says that the process of "explanation" is necessarily a reductive one, as the text is broken down into its various parts in order to unlock its hold on us. "The text is situated in its various contexts…and is subjected to…study and critique until the particularity of its appeal is explained as an effect of these generating forces" (181).

In a sense this second stage of analysis may remove us from the power of the text as felt during the moment of "understanding," the first stage. But Ricoeur goes on to say that a third stage, "comprehension," follows. Here a return to the work, bolstered and enlarged by the explanatory process, renews—in a stronger and more comprehensive way—the initial sense that the viewer had of the text's insistent meaning for his own life. "Comprehension," Andrew writes, "is synthetic in that it listens to the wholeness of the text rather than breaking it down into parts: further, it responds to the cues it finds in the work, initiating a project of meaning that is never complete" (182). The relationship between the text and the spectator thus becomes a living one. That is, one can return to certain films again and again because they never lose their ability to yield new or more elaborate meaning. It is this kind of film that humanist critics prefer to write about.

It should be mentioned at this point that the very broadness or generalness of the humanistic approach, its emphasis on an individual's intuitive insight into and sensitive interpretation of a film, is also purported to be this approach's major weakness. Though almost certainly leading to enrichment of the movie experience for those who read criticism, then go back to a film and see it in a new light, the humanist method is often criticized for its lack of intellectual rigor—that is, for its theoretically unfounded, methodologically unscientific, and unashamedly emotional assertions. Many feel that humanism is not a method at all, but simply a question of elevated taste; that it is only as good as the sensibility of the critic, only as convincing as the rhetoric of his prose. This approach causes problems for those who see the aim of criticism as the creation of an orderly, systematic body of knowledge about a subject, a body of knowledge aimed at achieving a consensus on the part of all informed participants. After all, one can always disagree with someone's attempts to justify his intuitive idea of what such-and-such a film "really meant," or an instinctive view of what makes a film "great," by simply saying, "It didn't strike me that way at all." Truly objective criteria upon which to base one's critical claims are not and could not be part of the humanistic approach to the cinema or any other art.

Nevertheless, when an article or a book makes intelligent sense, when we read someone's thoughts and feelings about a particular film and the shock of recognition occurs—"Oh, sure, now I see. I was thinking it had to be something like that, but this says it all. He hit the nail right on the head!"—we feel the force of the humanistic approach. And despite the claims of the more methodical approaches, perhaps that fellow-feeling or shock of recognition is all we can ask for in the world of the arts, where human experience is the primary area of investigation. Physics may be able to argue for an objective quality to its findings about certain aspects of the natural world, but the perception of a film seems likely at all times to have a subjective element to it. And here, perhaps, is where the work of a humanist may be valid in more ways than the work of other, more specialized writers of film criticism.

Those academic specialists, like journalistic reviewers at the other end of the spectrum, are essentially engaged in a non-aesthetic enterprise, one that in the case of the academics may instead be termed sociological, historical, political, psychological, anthropological, or even "linguistic." I am thinking of such methodologies as semiotics, (neo)formalism, Marxism, psychoanalysis and neo-Freudianism, feminism

and gender studies, (post)structuralism and deconstruction, and race-and-ethnicity, none of which I will attempt to define because the meaning is either abundantly transparent or hopelessly obscure. What these approaches all have in common is the attempt to turn film studies into a (pseudo)science and to use film as grist for one kind of ideological mill or other. This is not to say that there is *no* truth to any of these methods, only that each thinks *its* truth is the only truth and tries, through name-calling, to cow non-believers into public submission. No humanist (or genuine scientist, for that matter) would be guilty of such a crime against art—and hence humanity—for a humanist is by his very nature a pluralist with an interest in the human condition as it is experienced, rather than as it is "theoretized" or prescribed.

## The Work at Hand

This particular humanistic collection of film criticism, *Required Screening: Fifteen Must-See Films for the Art-House Connoisseur, 1924–1980*, attempts to offer readable, "unscientific" analyses, in survey-form, of what the author considers to be some of the most important international, as well as American, films and film artists, from the onset of the feature-film era to 1980—or from a relatively early point in the history of motion pictures to the period just before the emergence of a new (digital) aesthetic. Written not only with the educated viewer, or art-house connoisseur, in mind but also directed at university students, these essays cover some of the central films—and central issues raised—in today's world cinema courses and try to provide students with practical models to help them improve their own writing and analytical skills.

*Required Screening* proceeds chronologically and treats films from the following ten nations: Germany, Russia, the United States, France, Italy, Sweden, Japan, India, Cuba, and Australia. All these geographically representative films are artistic landmarks—and therefore must-see pictures—in one way or another, or in several ways: because of their very subject matter; because of their style and technical or formal advances; because of the historical periods, social settings, or religious backgrounds that gave impetus to their creation; and, ultimately, because of each picture's unique vision of the world. All the entries are supplemented by bibliographies, film credits, film images, directors' filmographies, a guide to film analysis, a glossary of film terms, and topics for writing and discussion. From a glance at the list of entries in *Required Screening*, the reader will quickly discover not only that most of the films treated are international in origin, but that most of them are also "art films." Hence, with a happy exception or two, American entertainment movies—the bulk of the U.S. cinematic output—are excluded, and this requires some comment.

By about 1920, long after American films had cornered the world market, a rough, debatable, but persistent generalization had come into being: America made entertainment movies, while Europe (and later, the rest of the world) made art films. Even back then some observers knew that there were great exceptions on both sides of that generalization, particularly the second part. (*Every* filmmaking country makes entertainment movies; they are the major portion of every nation's industry. But no country's entertainment movies have had the success of American pictures.) That

generalization has become increasingly suspect as it has become increasingly plain that good entertainment films cannot be made by the ungifted; further, that some directors of alpine talent have spent their whole careers making works of entertainment.

Nonetheless, for compact purposes here, the terms "entertainment" and "art" can serve to distinguish between those films, however well made and aesthetically rewarding, whose original purpose was to pass the time; and those films, however poorly made and aesthetically pretentious, whose original purpose was the illumination of experience and the extension of consciousness. In this view, the generalization about American and European films has some validity—less than was assumed for decades, still some validity. And that validity has determined the make-up of the collection of pieces in *Required Screening*. Which is to say that I write here predominantly about films made beyond American borders.

To be sure, I wish there were more American art films, but the nature of movie production in the United States—which is almost totally commercial and unsubsidized—prevents their creation. There was some hope, during the late 1960s and early 1970s, that this situation would change due to the collapse of the Hollywood studio system, the increase in foreign-film importation (and therefore foreign influence), the soaring expense of moviemaking, and the rise of the independent, "personal" film (to satisfy, as it were, the increasing number of "personal" critics such as Pauline Kael, Andrew Sarris, and Dwight Macdonald). However, American filmmakers soon learned that "independent" means independent only of the old assembly line. Indeed, in some ways the new system is more harried, less self-confident than the old studio procedure, where picture-people knew precisely what they were doing, or thought they did, and for whom they were doing it.

Put another way, independent production now means that, for each project, a producer not only needs to acquire a script and director and actors and facilities and distribution, he also has to acquire an audience—possibly a different audience for each film he produces, or at least not a relatively dependable general, homogeneous audience as in the past. No longer, then, is there any resemblance in the movie industry to a keeper throwing fish to trained seals. Making motion pictures is now much more like publishing books: each venture is a separate business enterprise, a separate risk and search. And the moment "personal" films do not make any money, they stop getting made in large numbers—as they have already done in comparison with the period of the late '60s and early '70s, when we saw such personal, and in some cases hugely moneymaking, pictures as *Easy Rider*, *The Hired Hand*, *Five Easy Pieces*, *Wanda*, *The Conversation*, *Badlands*, *Bonnie and Clyde*, *Alice's Restaurant*, *The Wild Bunch*, *The Rain People*, *The Graduate*, *Midnight Cowboy*, and many more.

The operative term at the start of the previous sentence is "money." The operative term in *Required Screening*, by contrast, is "art." I have nothing against money (who really does?), but I like my art divorced from it, or divorced from dependence on it, as much as possible. I hope the reader will agree and read on with pleasure—as well as profit.

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# F. W. Murnau's *The Last Laugh*



The period after 1924 in Germany produced a return to relative social normalcy following the horrors of World War I, with the enactment of the Dawes Plan, which ensured the evacuation of the Ruhr (mining) district by French and Belgian troops, the reduction of the amount of reparations the Germans had to pay as a result of their defeat, and the introduction of a new currency to safeguard the mark, end rampant inflation, and stabilize the economy. As a consequence, the German cinema began to turn away from the morbid and mannered, psychologized subjects of expressionism and toward the naturalistic *Kammerspiel* ("chamber film"), which abandoned the expressionistic concern for subjective or inner vision and instead dealt with the intimate details of *petit bourgeois* existence in deterministic tragedies. In such films of this genre as *New Year's Eve* (1924, dir. Lupu Pick) and *Nju* (1924, dir. Paul Czinner), there is a limited number of characters, who are generally nameless and referred to only by their roles; the external surroundings are sparse and dreary and are often used to reflect the characters' (subconscious) state of mind; significance is given

to everyday objects so that they seem to take on a life of their own; and intertitles are suppressed, which gives these films a great advantage in the maintaining of narrative pace and dramatic tension.

The *Kammerspiel* was followed by a related development: the kind of literal (but nonetheless studio-produced) representationalism exemplified by the "street films" of the second half of the decade—G. W. Pabst's *The Joyless Street* (1925), Bruno Rahn's *Tragedy of the Street* (1927), and Joe May's *Asphalt* (1929), for example. These films all dealt with the plight of ordinary people—the lower middle class living in big cities—during the postwar era of inflation and incarnated the spirit of *die neue Sachlichkeit* (the "New Objectivity"), which permeated German art and society at every level in this period. Cynicism, resignation, disillusionment, and finally acceptance of depressing, dehumanizing "life as it is" were the major characteristics of *die neue Sachlichkeit,* and these translated into a type of grim social realism in the street films.

One figure who contributed to all three of these genres or styles—"street films," *Kammerspiel*, and expressionism—is Carl Mayer, who not only enunciated the principles of the "chamber film" in such works as *Backstairs* (1921, dir. Leopold Jessner) and *Shattered* (1921, dir. Lupu Pick), but who also co-wrote the expressionistic *Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920, dir. Robert Wiene) as well as the prototypical "street film," Karl Grune's *The Street* (1923). In addition, Mayer wrote the script for F. W. Murnau's *The Last Laugh* (1924), a kind of combination *Kammerspiel* and "street film" that even incorporates some expressionistic techniques. What *The Last Laugh* has in common with much of Mayer's screenwriting—in addition to the films cited above, Germany's signal screenwriter of the era wrote the scenarios for *Genuine* (1920, dir. Wiene), *Earth Spirit* (1923, dir. Jessner), *New Year's Eve*, and *Miss Else* (1929, dir. Paul Czinner)—is the intimate study of character, frequently one from the lower middle class whose personality is in the process of disintegration.

Some critics gave much of the credit for the technical and stylistic innovations of *The Last Laugh*—my subject here—to Mayer himself. For instance, the moving or "unchained" camera featured in this film had previously been used in Mayer's script for *New Year's Eve*, directed by lesser light Lupu Pick. Mayer had first eliminated intertitles in *Shattered*, another collaboration with Pick, who was slated to direct and star in *The Last Laugh* until he and Mayer had a falling out. Mayer conceived *The Last Laugh* as part three of this trilogy, with each film a fierce post-expressionist foray into the trough between the old world and the new. The cameraman Karl Freund, with whom Mayer worked on several movies (including *The Last Laugh*), praised the writer's cinematic instincts with the following declaration: "A script by Carl Mayer was already a film" (Reimer, 201).

Indeed, *The Last Laugh* goes places no film had gone before. Murnau had used panning shots in *Nosferatu* (1922) and cameras had been moved briefly off their tripods in a few other films, but this was the first time that a mobile camera was thoroughly integrated into the production of a movie. For one drunken dream sequence, in fact, Freund strapped the camera to his chest (and batteries to his back, for balance), stumbling around in mock inebriety to capture a shot that lasts over a

minute onscreen. The result is the birth of a radically subjective cinema, plumbing the psyche of the protagonist and seeing the world as his bewildered eyes do. The camera practically becomes a character in itself in this film—actors can actually be seen trying to keep out of its way.

*The Last Laugh* thus becomes a bold experiment in narrative, completely—with one significant exception—eschewing intertitles. Combined with the moving camera, the absence of title-breaks allows for a stunning fluidity of visual expression, with the silent actors themselves guiding the story through pantomime. Moreover, the fact that Murnau (like Carl Mayer) first studied theater, as part of Max Reinhardt's Berlin acting troupe, itself contributes to *The Last Laugh*'s visual fluidity. For lighting augments camera movement in this film, so as to direct the eye where the director wishes it to go, even as lighting does the same on the theatrical stage. "Cutting within the frame," such a device is called, as the brighter area amidst less brightly lit surroundings becomes the center of attention, and as modeled or graded lighting renders the essential significance of faces, places, and things.

The key to the fullest interpretation of *The Last Laugh*, however, is an understanding less of its cinematic style than of the German concept of *Beruf*, which means not simply occupation or profession but calling and station, mission or purpose, identity and function. Indeed, the entire film can be seen as a parody of the idea of *Beruf*, culminating in the Emil Jannings character's escape, through sudden wealth, from the rigidity of all social and professional standing. The point of the final sequence of *The Last Laugh* (often called the "comic epilogue") is to establish conclusively the film's parodic intentions, for ironically, even though the former doorman and washroom attendant played by Jannings is now very rich, he does not in the least behave with the dignity and reserve, not to say smugness, of a rich man.

The Jannings character (one so identified with his doorman's position that Mayer never gives him a real name), for all his newly acquired wealth, is still an outsider among the other guests at his former place of employment, the Atlantic Hotel: they laugh at him because, although he is now wearing the proper uniform (an expensive suit), he does not behave properly, that is, according to the rules of his new monetary class. But the former doorman does not care; money has freed him, has even made him more of an egalitarian. The old fellow who went through the agonies of a kind of hell when he lost his doorman's uniform and post and was scorned by his neighbors— this man presently breaks the rules, especially the cardinal one of preserving distance between the haves and the have-nots. He gives his money away freely to the new washroom attendant, to all the bellboys, and to the former night watchman (now his bosom companion). He gives a beggar not only a few coins, but also a ride in his carriage. That is to say, the Jannings character enjoys his wealth and makes it enjoyable to others; he does not simply wear it on his sleeve for all to admire.

Significantly, Jannings gives nothing to the man who took his place as doorman, because the latter is all efficiency, no heart, and because the new doorman treats the old one not as the good, friendly person he has always been, but, begrudgingly, only as a rich customer. Equally significantly, the former night watchman, unlike the Jannings character, is still imbued with a respect for social hierarchies. He distrusts the bellhops who try to relieve him of his packages; and he starts to rise from the table

at the hotel restaurant, until restrained by Jannings, when the manager approaches. Beneath his now fine but ill-fitting clothing, the night watchman thus remains a servile proletarian.

To emphasize that the Emil Jannings character, though himself no longer a servile proletarian, nonetheless behaves outside his new "calling" during the final sequence or comic epilogue, Murnau shoots the reactions of upper-class hotel patrons to the sight of him and the former night watchman eating, drinking, and smoking with gusto, if not gaucheness, in the dining room: the wealthy guests find these two men ridiculous. To point up the craziness and unbelievability of Jannings' good luck—he inherits the fortune of one Mr. Monney, an American (or a Mexican, depending on the print of the film), by being the man in whose arms this eccentric millionaire died down in the washroom of the Atlantic Hotel—Murnau slyly shoots the incredulous, laughing reactions of the hotel's occupants to the news in the paper. The director is well aware of the contrived nature of the inheritance (a device apparently forced on him by UFA [Universum-Film Aktiengesellschaft], the film's producer, so as to effect a happy ending), so instead of shooting Mr. Monney's collapse into Jannings' arms and Jannings' later receiving news of the bequest, Murnau *reports* these events. He thus makes them seem more believable for their being given special status or framing in a newspaper and for their being mocked from afar, even as we would mock such occurrences.

Jannings' sudden wealth *is* funny, and I think that the only way to see it is as a comic device, not as an intrusion on the otherwise "real" world of *The Last Laugh*. The German title of the film supports this view of the Jannings character as the victim-cum-beneficiary of a comic plot, not as the tragic victim who gets the "last laugh" on his former tormentors—primary among them, his erstwhile boss at the hotel—when fate suddenly decides to smile his way for a change. Jannings doesn't get, nor does he desire, the last laugh on anyone in the end. He returns to the location of his former employ, the Atlantic, not to "give it back" to the manager who demoted him from doorman to washroom attendant at the first sign that his age was catching up to him, nor to lord his newfound wealth over the patrons of many years who quickly forgot him, but to enjoy from the point of view of a guest, or simply of a "retired doorman," the hotel that was for so many years the place of his *Arbeit*, the all-important German work. Murnau and Mayer titled the film *Der letzte Mann* (*The Last Man*), not *The Last Laugh*, for the original title signifies that the Jannings character was the last man in the company of the rich Mr. Monney when he died, and therefore would inherit all of his wealth according to the terms of this millionaire's will.

I call *The Last Laugh* (a title I shall continue to use only because this is the one by which most viewers know the film) a parody of the idea of *Beruf*, but by no means do I intend to suggest that this parody is at the Jannings' character's expense. On the contrary, Jannings' humanity, both his pride and his humility, work throughout the picture to suggest that he is above such parody and that Murnau and Mayer have other plans for him. Indeed, what gives *The Last Laugh* its permanence and power is the curious tension that exists between the work's parodic intentions, on the one hand, and Jannings' own portrayal of the doorman-washroom attendant. This tension is often mirrored by Murnau's camera. At the beginning of the film, for example, we

note that the moving camera identifies with the point of view of the person (Jannings?) descending to the hotel lobby in an open elevator, surveying the "ant farm" of wealthy patrons below; traversing the lobby, the camera scoots forward— resting atop a bicycle steered by cinematographer Karl Freund—to a set of revolving doors, water-streaked window glass, and finally the rainy street outside. This otherwise exhilarating camera movement exactly portends what will happen to Jannings, who, so secure in his doorman's job, is precipitously "kicked" down into the washroom, if not out the door of the hotel.

The camera makes much both of the revolving doors at the entrance to the Atlantic Hotel and of the swinging door leading downstairs to the washroom: the implication, for Jannings as for us all, is that one must go out the same way one came in, or go down the same way one came up. Down in the washroom, however, the benevolent camera photographs the Jannings character only from below the neck as he is putting on the drab smock of his new *Beruf*, so as to conceal from us his shame, if only momentarily. It is the night watchman's flashlight, normally used for searching out thieves and bums, that finally finds Jannings' face and, with it, not so much his shame and humiliation as the soft truth of his unflinching kindness and generosity—in contrast to the washroom attendant's pallid, shapeless smock or the doorman's uniform with its cumbersome, military-like façade of pomp and authority.

The Emil Jannings character's whole life, you see, had rested on his belief that he was performing well at the job he was meant to do, and that he was a responsible and loving family man. This is Germany at the height of the Weimar Republic (1919–33), after all (in a year, 1924, in which Hitler has been sentenced to five years in prison for engineering the failed Munich Beer-Hall Putsch). So hand in hand do job and family go that Jannings cannot think (after being demoted to washroom attendant) of giving his niece away in marriage if he is not dressed in his doorman's uniform. So important is this uniform to his identity, in fact, that he wears it religiously to and from work every day, despite its bulk. The uniform *becomes* Jannings to the extent that, once he takes his long coat off, he feels diminished and *is* diminished. Indeed, when he goes, in uniform, to the Atlantic on the morning that, unbeknownst to him, he is to be demoted and sees his replacement at work in front of the hotel, he reacts as much to seeing a second uniform on another man as to the man himself. Jannings never has any words with the haughty new doorman (who does not even acknowledge the soon-to-be-downgraded doorman as he passes), but he does seem genuinely crushed and utterly disbelieving at the idea that a duplicate of his precious uniform exists.

When the aunt of his niece's fiancé takes Jannings some lunch after he has been reduced in "rank" to washroom attendant (but kept the news from his family), she gets all the way to the entrance of the hotel without realizing that it isn't Jannings hailing cabs and greeting guests; to her, the uniform she sees *is* Jannings, despite the fact that now another man is wearing it. Murnau brilliantly has this woman close her eyes and girlishly hold out the lunch box and only then realize, when she gets no response, that it is not Jannings at the front door. (This is a strange "aunt," by the way, for she behaves like a wife toward the Jannings character, and, along with his niece, she seems to live in the same apartment with him. My guess is that Mayer and Murnau intended the aunt to be Jannings' lawful spouse—and the niece his daughter—but

relented for fear that a German audience would not be able to accept any parody that would have a wife—and daughter—do what these women were about to do.)

His demotion to washroom attendant is the beginning of the end for Jannings and the point where we realize completely what Murnau is attempting to do. The director wants us to see the man beneath the *Beruf*, the feeling beneath the form—something that the expressionists before him wanted to accomplish as well, albeit on a much grander scale. They wished to crush bourgeois "forms," bourgeois rigidity, totally and to cultivate the expression of the unconscious, the *Seele* or soul, the "true" self or the "new" man. Although Murnau uses some expressionistic techniques to project the state of Jannings' fevered mind, the exaggerated seriousness with which this character views his worsening situation (the hotel seems to lean menacingly down upon him at one point; later its revolving door is distorted to appear much taller and narrower), the director is pursuing a fundamentally comic vision in *The Last Laugh*—unlike the expressionists. (With few exceptions, they were essentially serious, so serious, I might add, that at times they were unintentionally comical and may in this way have contributed to expressionism's ultimate decline.) Murnau's concern is thus not with the expression of the individual unconscious or even subconscious, but instead with the individual both as a reflection of his society and as an untarnished or immutable entity unto himself.

Hence, when Jannings' family virtually kicks him out of the house for losing his job, he seems, incredibly, to accept this sentence or punishment without resistance. What is important to the family above all else is that he turn in his doorman's uniform, which he has continued to wear to and from his new job as washroom attendant in order to keep the bad news of his demotion from his relatives as long as possible. (The roots of Germany's love affair with uniforms—and the veiled militarism they symbolize—can be found in nineteenth-century Prussia and the subsequent unification of Germany under Prussian leadership.) When Jannings' neighbors in the tenement complex learn that he has lost his doorman's position, they taunt him cruelly for wearing a uniform he no longer has a right to wear, for assuming a false identity, as it were. Murnau sets the residence of the Jannings character in such a place because it is important that we get the idea of petty bourgeois conformity or uniformity in numbers—women constantly cleaning and gossiping, men rushing off to work every morning, children eternally at play—a conformity in which Jannings can no longer partake now that he has no uniform or job, let alone a wife and child of his own.

Earlier in *The Last Laugh*, a group of children playing in the tenement courtyard had excluded one child from their midst, but this child seemed banished less for anything it had done than because its gender was indeterminate: in appearance, neither fully male nor fully female. Like the Jannings character *sans* uniform, in other words, it seemed excluded because it was *without identity*. Jannings befriended this child on his way to work, giving it a friendly smile and a piece of candy. The night watchman, who is oddly child- or doll-like in behavior and appearance (falling asleep at dinner in the hotel with the rich Jannings, for instance, and reacting to his newfound status as "friend to the wealthy" with typically childlike aplomb) and who even slightly resembles the excluded child, returns Jannings' gesture, befriending him

when he sneaks back into the hotel at night to hang the doorman's coat back in the manager's closet.

From this point on, the night watchman is Jannings' only family, his "son," if you will. We never see Jannings' niece, her fiancé, or the fiancé's aunt again. This is parody of the highest order: a man loses his job and with it his social if not psychological identity, and, it could be said, from that moment on what passes for his family (since the Jannings character is, after all, unmarried) in effect does not recognize him. *Beruf*, then, is family, identity, work, *life*. Murnau and Mayer have thus almost imperceptibly demolished the very idea at the heart of the Weimar Republic's socio-economic success and its subsequent duping at Adolf Hitler's hands. I say "imperceptibly" because what we are drawn to, all the time that Murnau and Mayer are shattering the idea of *Beruf*, is the thoroughly human character played by Emil Jannings. As a result, a lot of what happens in *The Last Laugh*, though improbable in hindsight, is completely believable *while it is happening*. (This is why earlier I described the tension between parody and performance in the film as "curious," why it is perhaps better called a "suspension.")

*The Last Laugh* thus does not make the mistake of many movies with parodic or satirical intentions: the directors of these films assume that as long as they photograph actual (but not fully characterized) people engaged in exaggerated acts or events that otherwise, in reality, would be unlikely to occur (e.g., a mega-corporation gets complete control of an underfunded, urban police department, in exchange for which it will be allowed to turn run-down sections of the city into a high-end utopia that will function as an independent city-state free of American jurisdiction), disbelief will be suspended and they will get their point across. But they are mistaken. Their work is ultimately rejected because it appears ridiculous *and* unfunny, and because it contradicts unrelievedly what we know about the actions of human beings in the real world. I'm thinking here of such otherwise different pictures as *Putney Swope* (1969, dir. Robert Downey, Sr.), Paul Verhoeven's *RoboCop* (1987, whose nearly science-fiction plot I describe above), *Bamboozled* (2000, dir. Spike Lee), and *Tropic Thunder* (2008, dir. Ben Stiller). These films differ from such highly successful works as Chaplin's *The Gold Rush* (1925) and Keaton's *The General* (1926), which are purely comic in style as well as structure and many of whose "improbable acts" (partly made believable or acceptable by the otherwise artificial, silent environment in which they occur) are clearly intended to be seen as the products of their performers' exceptional athletic-acrobatic skills, as well as their uniquely humanized characters.

One can get "get away" with a film that has parodic or satirical *intentions*, but only for very short periods of time, in a skit or something comparable (as in the case of Monty Python films like *Holy Grail* [1975] and *The Meaning of Life* [1983], which succeed in their parts rather than as a whole). The German playwright Bertolt Brecht wrote such a skit as part of his script for Slatan Dudow's film *Kuhle Wampe, oder: Wem gehört die Welt?* (*Empty Stomach, or: Who Owns the World?*, 1932). I shall describe this scene because its theme is Murnau's in *The Last Laugh*, if Brecht does execute his subject more savagely: the parodying or burlesquing of *Beruf*, or of simple propriety, respectability, and self-sufficiency. To wit: a young, unemployed worker in the Berlin of the Weimar Republic comes home to his family's apartment.

He enters and begins to set the place in order: he hangs up clothes, puts other things in their place, and cleans up generally. Next he goes to the mirror atop a dresser and grooms himself: combing his hair, straightening his tie, brushing off his jacket. He puts the brush and comb back where they belong. He then takes off his watch and carefully lays it on the dresser. After doing all of these things, the young man goes to the window, opens it, and promptly jumps to his death…Without the identity of his *Beruf*, the Jannings character in *The Last Laugh* is turned out—rejected *and* evicted—by his family. Dispossessed of his own identity, like his father and many other Berliners in 1931, and completely in loathing of that identity (however much, or *because*, he is under its spell), the Brecht character or "construct" turns *himself* out: he commits suicide.

So the Emil Jannings character, or perhaps it is better to say the acting of the great Jannings himself, rescues *The Last Laugh* from the "ridiculousness" I have described in films with similar parodic or satiric intentions. Murnau, in turn, miraculously rescues Jannings from the world of parody and places him in the more salutary one of comedy. Or rather, the director has the worlds of parody and comedy converge with Jannings as their focal point, because at the same time as the Jannings character breaks out of the bounds of *Beruf*—by transcending *Beruf* through sudden, unexpected wealth, then transcending wealth (or such conventional synonyms for it as greed, exploitation, or even crime) through sincere, practiced generosity and kindness—he is actually remaining the kind of person he was at the start of the film, when he was still the looked-up-to doorman. Things have changed, then, but things have also remained the same. Even as Murnau has rescued this washroom attendant, and the night watchman himself has saved him from possible further humiliation over the return of the doorman's coat to hotel management, so too does Jannings now rescue the watchman from the loneliness of the night. The Jannings character does not simply give this man money and gifts, he gives him something far more important and potentially imperishable: *his friendship*.

As for Murnau's "rescue" of Jannings in the comic epilogue, critics' and historians' views of the epilogue fall into three main groups. There are those who praise *The Last Laugh* exclusively as a tragedy, without any attention to the epilogue (Bardèche & Brasillach, 255–256; Eisner, *Haunted Screen*, 207–221; Jacobs, 309–310); those who praise the majority of the film as tragic and puzzle over why Murnau added a comic epilogue (Cook, 122; Fell, 144; Eisner, *Murnau*, 154, 158; Mast, 143–144); and those who praise the addition of the epilogue, which they claim by its very improbability reinforces the sense that the body of the film is about real life—and that only Hollywood-style narratives, or works of popular fiction, have happy endings, which by its very nature the epilogue then satirizes (Barlow, 146, 153; Ellis, 100–101; Kracauer, 101).

Murnau and Mayer themselves contributed to this last view, since the only intertitle in the film, right before the "comic epilogue," reads as follows: "Here at the scene of his last disgrace the old man will slowly pine away, and the story would really have ended there had not the author taken pity on the forsaken old man and added an epilogue in which he makes things happen as, unfortunately, they do not happen in real life." Nonetheless, I stand by my interpretation of the epilogue as

organic to the comic-parodic meaning of *The Last Laugh*, rather than as a mere distancing device that reminds us, through the artificiality of its happy ending, of the reality of the Jannings character's suffering and disgrace.

*The Last Laugh* is not a tragedy gone wrong, then. The Jannings character loses his doorman's job because of advancing age, not because of some flaw or internal division in his character. And he does not come to any great awareness about the roller-coaster ride we call life, for he is not a thinker, a philosophizer, or a rationalizer. Something bad or unfortunate happens to him, and something good or fortunate happens to him, and he remains constant throughout. This is the sense in which he is "comic": he endures, ready to go through the same experience again if he has to; he is renewed. Comedy, as such, is life- or commencement-like: procreative and life-affirming; tragedy is death- or end-like: sacrificial and life-denying.

Those who still feel that Murnau tacks onto *The Last Laugh* a happy ending (though not *so* happy, in the end, since we don't see Jannings tearfully reunited with repentant family members), that he mixes tragedy and sentimentality or contrivance to the detriment of high seriousness, might look at Jannings' remaining the same man in wealth that he was on the doorman's salary as the suggestion that, had he *not* struck it rich, he would have remained essentially the same good-hearted person in his lowly, miserable job as a washroom attendant—even one shunned by his family. Murnau avoids sentimentality, moreover, by not having Jannings the washroom attendant comforted by, and comforting, the night watchman in their mutual isolation. Just consider how the intelligent viewer would have totally rejected such a scene as a stacking of the emotional deck. Then consider how natural and almost breathtaking it is to see the rich Jannings freely dispensing his wealth to others, including the night watchman, and fully enjoying himself in their hearty company.

All of this in total silence. Not a word is heard during the film, which, of course, was made before the advent of sound. And there is only the one aforementioned intertitle, before the epilogue. Its silence, in fact, is perhaps what is truly breathtaking about *The Last Laugh*. If for the French filmmaker Robert Bresson "the soundtrack invented silence" (38)—needed it, that is—then for Murnau silence had no knowledge of sound and did not need it: Jannings' uniform, his face, his body, his gestures tell all. Indeed, *The Last Laugh* is discursive in a way that much silent cinema is not. Murnau's use of some expressionistic techniques contributes to this discursiveness, as does Karl Freund's fluid camera (and probably Giuseppe Becce's music, as well, though I have never seen a print of the film accompanied by Becce's score). But, above all, it is the expressiveness of Emil Jannings' acting that is responsible for the discursive effect: the telling and the guiding. We accept Jannings' silence, without question, from the start because we know intuitively that we are in the presence of the comic mode, on which silence confers a special blessing.

The doorman Jannings' preening attention to himself, his isolation in his position as head doorman, his uniform that makes him stand out almost grotesquely: these "speechless" elements all signal subliminally that we are in the world of comedy, where concentration is placed on the individual in reflection of others (commonality) more than in action upon them (exceptionality), and where fate is less something metaphysical over which one has little control than something social over which all of

humanity presides. For all Murnau's isolation of him, for all of parody's subjection of him to extremes (prideful doorman, pathetic washroom attendant, ebullient millionaire), Jannings has more in common with those around him and is more dependent upon them than not. He pays attention to himself, as doorman, so that others will pay attention to him (the reverse is so in his job as washroom attendant, a position so undesirable that it has made Jannings more, or less, than one of the crowd); he lives for the life of Atlantic Hotel, that of his tenement neighborhood, that of the humble people on whom he bestows his wealth.

Film is ideally suited as a form to Murnau's "serious comedy," or let us call it comedy with a literal as well as figurative vision, because it can visually place the individual in the wide company of others, thereby stressing almost effortlessly what he has in common with them, as well as isolate the individual in the frame, thereby designating him as the particular victim/beneficiary of its motions. If much of the film comedy of Charlie Chaplin is criticized for being "uncinematic," this criticism should emphasize less that Chaplin was not an innovator in filmic technique than that he did not exploit the medium's ability precisely to show us what the Tramp has in common with other people as well as he what he has peculiar unto himself. By contrast, if much of the film comedy of Buster Keaton is praised for its innovation in technique, this comedy should also be criticized for its excessive, nearly narcissistic concentration on the idiosyncratic nature of the Keaton persona.

Silent acting itself is ideally suited to Murnau's "serious comedy" and film comedy in general, as has often been maintained, because its silence is unreal in the same way that I've suggested comedy's movement is artificial or improbable. Emil Jannings' silent acting may be unreal, but it is nevertheless wonderfully compelling, even mesmerizing, because it is accomplished without words. *The Last Laugh*'s own movement may be artificial or improbable, but exactly this quality enables the film to make so biting a comment on the Germanic society out of which it arose. The last laugh, indeed.

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*Backstairs* (1921), directed by Leopold Jessner

*Shattered* (1921), directed by Lupu Pick

*The Street* (1923), directed by Karl Grune

*Nju* (1924), directed by Paul Czinner

*The Last Laugh* (1924), directed by F. W. Murnau

*New Year's Eve*, a.k.a. *Sylvester* (1924), directed by Lupu Pick

*The Joyless Street* (1925), directed by G. W. Pabst

*Variety* (1925), directed by E. A. Dupont

*Tragedy of the Street* (1927), directed by Bruno Rahn

*Asphalt* (1929), directed by Joe May

*The Blue Angel* (1930), directed by Josef von Sternberg

*Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1931), directed by Piel Jutzi

# Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin*
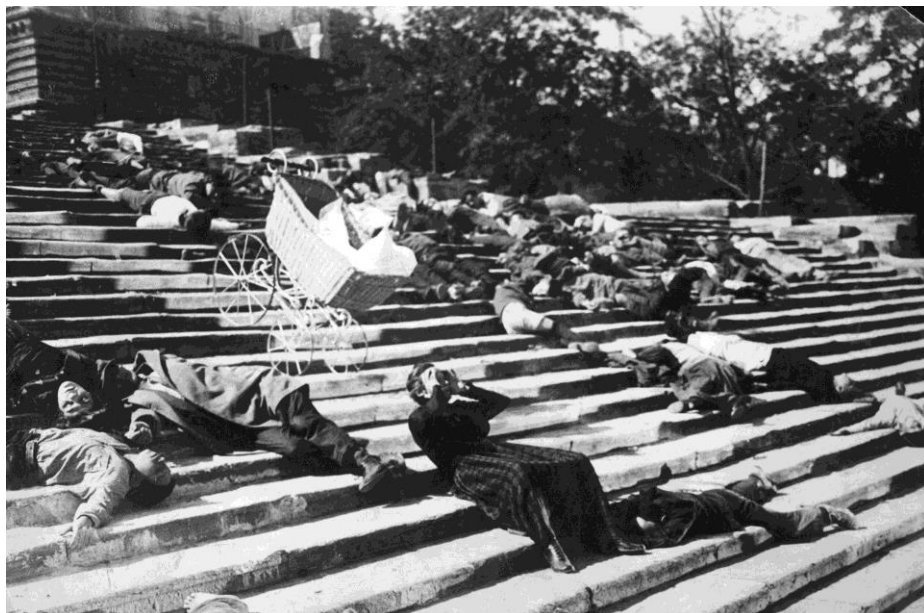


Sometimes one imagines that there is a small but constant supply of genius throughout the world and that a particular juncture of circumstances in any single place touches the local supply to life. Otherwise, how to explain the sudden flowering of Athenian architecture, Elizabethan drama, or Italian Renaissance painting? Can one believe that there had been no previous talent in those places, at that time, and that geniuses were born on cue? It almost seems that the right confluence of events brings dormant, omnipresent genius awake; without those events, nothing.

This theory, admittedly fanciful, gets some support from what happened in Soviet Russia in the 1920s. A new revolutionary state was born as a new revolutionary art emerged, and that combination brought forth at least three superb creators in the new art: Vsevolod Pudovkin, Alexander Dovzhenko, and—the most important because the most influential—Sergei Eisenstein. Conjecturally, each of them might have had an outstanding career in another field, but the Russian Revolution and its need for film, one may say, made geniuses of these three men.

For all the joy and ebullience that attended the birth of Soviet cinema and Eisenstein's entrance into it, his career as a whole is a sad story, and it will put my comments on *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) in true, cruelly ironic light to have some of

the biographical facts first. Sergei Mikhailovich Eisenstein was born in Riga in 1898, studied engineering in St. Petersburg, and entered the Red Army in 1918 to fight in the Russian Civil War (1917–22). While in the army, Eisenstein became involved in amateur theatricals, which intensified an interest in theater that he had felt since he was a boy. As a result, he decided to abandon an engineering future for a life in the theater.

In 1920 he was demobilized, got himself to Moscow, and found a job as a set designer at one of the new workers' theaters, where he learned to distrust traditional, character-based drama and to seek instead a proletarian one in which the masses would become a collective hero and social problems would be examined. He went on to do some designing for the renowned theater director Vsevolod Meyerhold, whose own anti-psychological, anti-"internalizing" views influenced him greatly; then from 1922 to 1924, Eisenstein himself directed plays, including one called *Gas Masks*, by Sergei Tretyakov. But his impulse toward direction was much more cinematic than theatrical: he staged *Gas Masks* in an actual gasworks!

From there Eisenstein moved quickly into film. He had already done a short film interlude for a theatrical production, and in 1924 he was assigned to direct an episode of a planned eight-part picture that would explore the events that led to the 1917 revolution. The resulting film was *Strike* (1924), which was released as an individual piece because the plans for the eight-part epic were never realized. The picture depicts a 1903 strike by the workers of a factory in pre-revolutionary Russia, and their subsequent suppression by cavalrymen sent by the czarist state. *Strike* is quite an accomplished work for a first-time director and in many ways can be seen as a rough draft for Eisenstein's first masterpiece—*Battleship Potemkin*.

Absolutely congruent with his bursting film energies was his fervor for the Communist revolution and the establishment of the Soviet state. These factors are integral in any discussion of Eisenstein's career. To think of him as a director who just happened to be Russian or who (in those early days) was subservient to a state-controlled industry yet managed to slip some good art into his films despite his subservience, is to miss the core of Eisenstein. His works from this period were cinematic exponents of his beliefs.

With his next completed film, *October*—commissioned to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Russian Revolution and released in 1928—the complications begin. Originally the picture had sequences showing Leon Trotsky's part in the revolution of 1917, but while Eisenstein was finishing it, Trotsky went into disrepute and then into exile as Joseph Stalin ascended. Eisenstein had to revise *October* to take account of this rewriting of history. His troubles then multiplied as time went on, as his political enemies within the Communist Party increasingly denounced his films and charged him with "formalism"—a preference for aesthetic form over ideological content. For Eisenstein, such a view failed to understand the importance of creating new forms to convey the transformed social relations of a post-revolutionary society. For the Communist Party, by contrast, socialist realism became the only acceptable style—one that would be easily accessible to the uneducated masses, and a style in which the triumphs of the Party would be celebrated and its failings ignored through

stories that returned to the basic principles of realism. The Stalin era, then, was not exactly a continuation of the high, shining Bolshevik days.

To sum up: the rest of Eisenstein's working life, until his death of a heart attack in 1948, is a story of frustration and frequent abortion. Out of numerous projects, he completed only four more films: his last silent work, *The General Line* (a.k.a. *Old and New*, 1929), together with the sound pictures *Alexander Nevsky* (1938) and *Ivan the Terrible*, Part I (1944) and Part II (1946). Even an expedition that Eisenstein made to the West ended abortively. He was allowed to go to the United States in 1930, discussed several projects with a Hollywood studio, made none, and then shot a lot of footage in Mexico in the early 1930s for a film never edited, although others arranged a version of it that was released in 1979: *¡Que viva México!*, about Mexican culture and the revolutionary spirit. (The picture was produced by Upton Sinclair and a small group of financiers.)

Eisenstein spent much of his time in later years teaching at the Institute of Cinematography in Moscow, writing on film form and theory, and not complaining about the state. Still, the facts speak for themselves. This furiously imaginative, innovative, and energetic man left a total of only seven completed films. One virtually completed picture, *Bezhin Meadow* (based on a Turgenev story) was apparently destroyed by the Soviet government in 1938, though the official line is that it was destroyed by German bombs in World War II. Then around 1968 a reconstruction of *Bezhin Meadow* was engineered when splices from the editing table, saved by Eisenstein's wife, Pera Atasheva, were discovered. Cobbled together along with a track of Prokofiev music, intertitles fashioned from the original script, and a brief spoken introduction, the film exists today as a work of some thirty minutes.

The U.S.S.R.'s waste of Eisenstein's talent, melancholy in any view, is especially grim when seen in the light that blazes off the screen from *Battleship Potemkin*. When it was first shown abroad in 1926, it was hailed by many, including such disparate figures as Max Reinhardt and Douglas Fairbanks, as the best film that had yet been made anywhere. Agree with that opinion or not, few can see this relatively short picture—five reels, at anywhere from sixty-five to eighty-five minutes depending on the print—without being catapulted into an experience that is stunning in itself and illuminating of much that followed in film history.

During the mid-1920s, one must recall, the Soviets were busy trying to consolidate ideologically their political and military victories, and they called on the arts to help. Soviet leaders, having recognized the power and potential of film in particular as a persuasive, patriotic medium (especially to reach the illiterate masses), assumed control of the movie industry, denounced the capitalist cinema of pre-revolutionary czarist Russia, and decreed that the Soviet cinema was to be used for education and propaganda—to indoctrinate the Russian people and to promote class consciousness throughout the world.

In the case of *Battleship Potemkin*, the Soviets wanted a film to mark the twentieth anniversary of the uprisings of 1905 that were precursors to the revolution of 1917. Eisenstein was assigned to make a huge work called *The Year 1905*, dealing with the events of the earlier, failed, but momentous outbreak against czarism. Accordingly, he and his collaborator, Nina Agadzhanova-Shutko, prepared a script in

which the mutiny on the battleship *Potemkin* played only a small part. When Eisenstein went to Odessa to shoot that part, however, he decided to limit the film to that single mutinous episode and the events connected with it, as "the emotional embodiment of the whole epic of 1905" (Eisenstein, 1959: 27).

In 1905, Russia remained a fundamentally feudal country. Ruled by a succession of autocratic and cruel czars, democracy, let along communism, remained a distant dream for most of the people. A war with Japan for control of Manchuria and the Korean peninsula in 1904 was intended to bolster support for Czar Nicholas II's regime, but it went badly: the Russian imperial navy was destroyed by the Japanese fleet in the Battle of Tsushima Strait in May 1905. Protests grew as the war continued; work stoppages occurred across the country; and in St. Petersburg, hundreds of workers were killed by government troops for taking to the streets to urge the implementation of labor reforms. Other uprisings took place, as soldiers stationed at Kronstadt, near St. Petersburg, mutinied, along with sailors aboard the battleship *Potemkin* in the czar's Black Sea fleet. (The czarist government nonetheless remained in power until World War I, when another set of hardships and defeats set the stage for the successful Communist revolution of 1917.)

Eisenstein's film, shot on location, presents the story of the *Potemkin* mutiny in five parts. Each of these parts, like an act in a good drama, is a structure in itself—with its own cantilevered stress and tensions—that contributes to the structure of the whole. In the first part, "Men and Maggots," while the battleship is anchored near Odessa, a major Ukrainian seaport, in June 1905, the restive crew—their morale low and their discipline harsh following defeat in the Russo-Japanese War—protest to their officers against the maggoty meat they are being served for the midday meal. The ship's medical officer examines the obviously infested meat and pronounces it edible, further provoking the men.

In the second part, "Drama on the Quarterdeck," the captain of the *Potemkin* threatens to shoot any sailor who will not eat the meal. Some relent and some continue to refuse. The mutineers are then covered with a tarpaulin and a firing squad is ordered to shoot. The sailor Vakulinchuk pleads with the men not to shoot, and after a long, suspenseful sequence that alternates between the condemned men and the firing squad, the squad refuses to fire, joins the crew in mutiny, and helps to take over the ship. In the ensuing confusion, the ship's doctor is thrown overboard and Vakulinchuk is killed. In the third section of the film, "Appeal from the Dead," the sympathetic townspeople of Odessa visit the body of the dead sailor, lying in state at the harbor, to pay their respects.

The fourth part, "The Odessa Steps," is the highlight of *Battleship Potemkin* and one of the most famous sequences in the history of cinema, arguably the most famous. (A number of films pay homage to the scene, including Terry Gilliam's *Brazil* [1985] and Brian De Palma's *The Untouchables* [1987], while several pictures spoof it, among them Woody Allen's *Love and Death* [1975] and Juliusz Machulski's *Déjà Vu* [1990].) This section begins with some of the citizens of Odessa as they take gifts of food by boat to the sailors on the anchored *Potemkin*, while others cheer and wave their support from the harbor. Suddenly, some of the townspeople begin scurrying down a long series of outdoor steps overlooking the harbor. The reason for this action

becomes clear when viewers see a shot of a line of Cossack soldiers with their guns at the ready.

The action of part four continues as the Cossacks march down the steps, occasionally firing, as the townspeople flee before them. (Though many citizens of Odessa were killed in this actual 1905 incident, it was only when Eisenstein saw the steps, on location, that he thought of staging the massacre at that location.) Close-ups of wounded people, of hands being stepped on, and of horrified faces convey the terror. At one point there is a change in the relentless downward movement of the Cossacks, as a mother picks up her badly injured child, who is probably already dead, and walks up the steps in an appeal to the soldiers not to shoot. They do not listen; they fire on her and continue their downward march. Another mother, holding onto a baby carriage with her child in it, is shot and slowly falls, letting go of the carriage—which, in time elongated by the editing, begins rolling down the steps uncontrolled. Intercut with the shots of the runaway carriage are shots of the horrified face of a young man wearing glasses.

In the fifth and last section, "Meeting the Squadron," the *Potemkin* has to sail out of Odessa harbor past a squadron of other ships sent by the czarist government to retake the vessel. There are tense moments as sailors prepare to do battle, but when the mutineers signal to the other ships "Comrades, join us," the *Potemkin* is allowed to sail out unmolested. In fact, the battleship sailed to Constanta in Romania, where the crew of over 700 opened her seacocks and then sought refuge inland (where the majority of them remained, at least until the Russian Revolution of 1917); Eisenstein, however, leaves the story open-ended, with the *Potemkin* sailing forward through the friendly squadron and bearing the seed of revolution that was to bloom twelve years later.

*Battleship Potemkin* is clearly a story of heightened political consciousness. In such stories the hero undergoes a set of life experiences that lead him to see things anew: specifically, to see how the larger forces of capitalism and class struggle shape more particular events that might otherwise be described as the products of accident, fate, or individual will and determination. A heightened consciousness sees connection instead of disconnection, unity instead of alienation, class solidarity rather than personal pursuit. Individual experience thus becomes situated in relation to the larger political and economic structures that govern social existence.

Eisenstein's approach to this type of story, however, differed from the work of his contemporary Vsevolod Pudovkin, who in films such as *Mother* (1926), *The End of St. Petersburg* (1927), and *Storm over Asia* (1928) told tales of how an *individual* character achieves heightened political consciousness. Eisenstein, by contrast, de-emphasized the individual protagonist and stressed the group working together rather than being led by a hero. Moreover, to further de-emphasize individuality or personality (let alone star aura), he used non-professionals rather than actual actors in many of the roles; since he did not place particular stress on character development, the look or physical type of the character was therefore much more important to this director than performing ability.

One of Eisenstein's great achievements as a filmmaker, then, is that he provided a model for a cinema of groups, crowds, and masses rather than individuals. In

*Battleship Potemkin* he does so by telling the story of three distinct examples of political awakening over the course of five sections or acts. The first example involves the sailors aboard the *Potemkin* as they awaken during Acts I and II ("Men and Maggots" and "Drama on the Quarterdeck") to the systematic abuse that their indenture to the czar entails. In the second awakening of consciousness, during Acts III and IV ("Appeal from the Dead" and "The Odessa Steps"), the citizens of Odessa realize and express their solidarity with the mutinous crew of the *Potemkin*. In the final awakening of Act V ("Meeting the Squadron"), sailors aboard the rest of the imperial Baltic fleet realize that they and the *Potemkin*'s crew have the czar as their common enemy. The film thus has a collective hero, the Russian masses—represented by the mutineers on the *Potemkin*, the people of Odessa, and the sailors who mutiny on other ships—who rebel against czarist oppression. Each awakening successively broadens the political scope of *Battleship Potemkin*, from the revolt of one ship's crew, through the rising up of one town, to the rebellion of an entire fleet.

Irrespective of the viewer's political beliefs, this story is a natural thriller apart from being a narrative of consciousness-raising. Nothing has wider or more direct theatrical appeal than resistance to tyranny, whether the resistance comes in the form of Spartacus, William Tell, the Boston Tea Party, or the crew of a Russian warship. To be sure, any competent Soviet director could have made the *Potemkin* story into an exciting film. But Eisenstein—and, to repeat, this is the core of his importance—was an *artist of revolution*, not merely a good director, not merely a gifted propagandist. That revolution was as central and generative for his art as, to cite a lofty precedent, Christianity was for Giotto. There are acres and acres of fourteenth-century Italian frescoes and canvases that present Christian ideas more or less affectingly, but the Arena Chapel in Padua is the work of a Christian genius and a genius that was Christian. In proportion, the same relation exists between Eisenstein's genius and Soviet communism.

The dynamics behind the particularity of this director's art can be traced to Marxist concepts and, I think, to none more clearly than to some in the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848, by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. I do not maintain that Eisenstein used the *Manifesto* as an explicit text, but he certainly knew it well and its ideas were certainly part of his intellectual resources. One idea in the *Manifesto* seems outstandingly relevant in this context. In the second section, where the authors anticipate objections to their arguments, they write:

> Does it require deep intuition to comprehend that man's ideas, views, and conceptions change—that, in one word, man's consciousness changes—with every change in the conditions of his material existence, in his social relations and in his social life? (Marx, 260)

Straight to this profound concept, that a changed world means a changed awareness of the world, Eisenstein struck in his filmmaking, and never more deeply than in *Battleship Potemkin*. That he was following Marx preceptively I cannot say, but clearly he felt that a new society meant a new kind of *vision*; that the way people saw things must be altered; that it was insufficient to put new material before, so to

speak, old eyes. Anyone anywhere, in any narrative art form, could tell a story of heroic resistance in traditional style; it was his duty as a revolutionary artist, Eisenstein felt (and later wrote [1957: 124]), to find an aesthetically revolutionary way to tell a politically revolutionary story.

The prime decision was in the visual texture. He wanted to avoid conventional historical drama; he wished to make a drama of history. He and his regular cameraman, Eduard Tisse, aimed at a kind of newsreel look: not coarse graininess (there is, indeed, a good deal of subtle black-and-white gradation here), but not painterly chiaroscuro either, no imitation museum-look. Eisenstein wanted the feeling, essentially, of extraordinary eavesdropping. A scion of this approach was Gille Pontecorvo's story of the Algerian independence movement, *The Battle of Algiers* (1965), except for the difference that, in these earlier days, Eisenstein relied very much less than Pontecorvo on individual performances. That was Eisenstein's second decision: as noted earlier, he used very few professional actors in *Battleship Potemkin*.

Mostly, the director used ordinary people in this picture, people whose faces and bodies he happened to like for particular roles—a furnace man as the ship's doctor, a gardener as the ship's priest. Each one was used for a relatively short performance that Eisenstein could control easily and heighten with camera angles and editing, in a kind of mosaic process. Eisenstein called this approach "typage," the casting of parts with such striking faces—often introduced in close-up, sometimes intense close-up— that our very first glimpse tells us most of what we need to know about the person as an element in the mosaic. In his subsequent films *Alexander Nevsky* and both parts of *Ivan the Terrible*, Eisenstein blended the use of typage with large roles for professional actors, but in *Battleship Potemkin* human depths come from the combination of "typed" pieces, of shots, rather than the performative exploration of any one piece or shot.

The idea of typage leads directly to the cinematic technique most closely associated with Eisenstein: montage (from the French verb *monter*, meaning "to mount, arrange, or assemble"). Basically, montage is editing: the selection and arrangement of bits of film to produce certain effects. Every film ever made, from *Battleship Potemkin* to television commercials, literally contains montage. But Eisenstein's use of montage was different from any use of it before him, including the work of his acknowledged master D. W. Griffith; is immediately recognizable as Eisenstein's own; and is the source of much that followed him. To wit: Eisenstein's theory of montage—based on the Marxist dialectic, which involves the collision of thesis and antithesis—calls for the juxtaposition of shots, and "attractions" (e.g., lighting, camera angle, character movement) within shots, to create meaning. Such a theory does not simply require that shots with particular meanings be built into a whole, but sees each frame as a unit with a dynamic visual charge of a particular kind; the goal is to bring the dynamic charge of one frame into conflict or contrast with the visual charge of the next, and hence to create a wholly new phenomenon that is not the sum of the two charges but something greater than, and different from, them both.

Eisenstein's theory of editing was thus based on the dialectical synthesis of contradictory shots. Instead of trying to make a series of shots link smoothly together

for narrative purposes, as most filmmakers did (so-called classical or "invisible" cutting), he wanted to produce a "shock" when one shot changed to another. He was particularly concerned with the rhythm established by this series of shocks, so that the length of individual shots was often determined by the underlying rhythm of the sequence rather than by the requirements of the overall narrative. Eisenstein wanted, then, to build a film almost musically by using different shots (long ones, medium shots, close-ups) and cutting them in such a way as to bombard the viewer with a whole series of conflicting images that would heighten individual moments, convey the intended mood, and enhance selected emotions. By experimenting in this way with the rhythm or tempo of his editing, he was able to affect audiences with a purely filmic style that could not be duplicated in any other medium.

Eisenstein wrote often on this subject, which for him was the heart of cinema. Like other Soviet formalists, he claimed that realism captured in long shot is too near reality and that films must capture the *essence*, not merely the surface, of reality—which is filled with irrelevancies. The artistry, for Eisenstein, lay not in the materials of reality *per se*, but rather in the way they could be taken apart and reconstructed to expressively convey the idea underlying the undifferentiated jumble of real life. He believed that the essence of existence itself is constant change, and that the conflict of opposites is the mother of such change. The function of all artists is to capture this kinetic collision of opposites, to incorporate dialectical conflicts not only in the subject matter of art but in its forms and techniques as well. Primary among those techniques, naturally, was not the realistic long take, or uninterrupted sequence shot, but atomized, formalistic, oppositional montage.

For Eisenstein, there were five kinds of montage. Briefly put, these are: metric montage, which is simply the relation or conflict between the lengths of the various shots; rhythmic montage, which is based on the conflict generated between the rhythm of character movement within shots and the visual composition, as well as temporal duration, of those same shots; tonal montage, in which shots are arranged according to the "tone" or "emotional sound" of the dominant attraction within each shot; overtonal montage, in which the basis for joining shots is not merely the dominant attraction, but the totality of stimulation provided by that dominant attraction and all of its "overtones" and "undertones" (overtonal montage is thus a synthesis of metric, rhythmic, and tonal montage, appearing not at the level of the individual frame but only at the level of the projected film); and intellectual or thematic montage, in which similar actions are juxtaposed or seen in conjunction but have been performed for different reasons (e.g., a hammer blow by a blacksmith, a hammer blow by a murderer).

All five types of montage may be found in *Battleship Potemkin*'s Odessa Steps sequence, in which czarist soldiers massacre Odessa citizens who are sympathetic to the *Potemkin* mutineers. As for the first three types, an example of metric montage is the increase in editing tempo to intensify audience excitement during the massacre. Rhythmic montage occurs in the conflict between the steady marching of the soldiers toward the fleeing crowd and the editing rhythm, which is out of synchronization with the soldiers' boots and thus ideationally establishes a different political impulse; the final pull of tension is supplied by the transfer from the rhythm of descending feet to

another rhythm—a new kind of downward movement—the runaway baby carriage rolling down the steps. Tonal montage occurs in the many conflicts of planes, masses, light-and-shadow, and intersecting lines, as in the shot depicting a row of soldiers pointing their rifles down at a mother and her son, with the soldiers' shadows cutting transversely across the steps and the helpless pair.

Although Eisenstein claimed to have discovered overtonal montage while editing *The General Line* four years after *Battleship Potemkin*, overtonal montage can be detected in the Odessa Steps sequence in the development of the editing along simultaneous metric, rhythmic, and tonal lines—the increase in editing tempo, the conflict between editing and movement within the frame, and the juxtaposition of light and shadow as well as intersecting lines, of planes as well as masses. Finally, there is an example of intellectual montage at the end of the sequence, after the *Potemkin* has responded to the massacre by firing on the czarist headquarters in Odessa. Three shots of marble lions—the first is sleeping, the second waking, and the third rising—seen in rapid succession give the impression of a single lion rising to its feet, a metaphor for the rebellion of the Russian masses against czarist oppression.

These were not academic formulations on Eisenstein's part. These five kinds of montage were, for him, organs of a vibrant, living art. With them, and combinations of them, he fashioned *Battleship Potemkin* into a kind of bomb that penetrates our customary apperceptions to burst below the surface and shake us from within. That bomb—the montage in *Battleship Potemkin* as well as its five-part structure—had its origins at least partly in practical considerations. Raw film stock was in very short supply in the early Soviet days. Most of what was available was in relatively short snippets, so directors had to work in short takes. Eisenstein thus developed the aesthetics of montage out of an exigency, but by fragmenting reality into bits and pieces in this way, he also suggested that reality could be reconstituted—to revolutionary end. His seemingly nervous, ever-cutting camera itself portends a society in transition, in restless movement to another (political) place: a society, that is, in the throes of change.

Furthermore, most Soviet film theaters at the time had only one projector; there was a pause when one reel ended and another reel had to be put on the machine. The five parts of *Battleship Potemkin* are on five reels, so the pauses come at reasonably appropriate moments. Yet, as is so often true in the history of art, the practical needs were not constrictive but stimulating. Another great precedent from the Italian Renaissance: the *David* (1504) in Florence is huge because in the early 1500s the city had a huge block of marble on its hands, left over from an unfulfilled commission, and asked Michelangelo to make use of it. One more example, from film itself: the postwar Italian neorealists, like Eisenstein, frequently used non-professionals in leading roles. But they did so less out of proletarian choice, or on account of a fragmented editing style that could accommodate the use of amateurs, than because amateur actors would mesh better with real settings, photographed in full shot, than would stars accustomed to studio surroundings, of which few remained in Rome (and were therefore too costly) on account of the Allied bombing—hence the need to shoot on location.

With the very opening moments of *Battleship Potemkin*, in any event, we know we are in the presence of something new, and the miracle is that we know it every time we see the film. The waves beat at the shore, the lookouts converse, the ship steams across the sea, and all of this is modeled with an energy, controlled yet urgent, that bursts at us. Then, when we cut to the crew's quarters and move among the slung hammocks, we know we are in the hands of an artist who sees the difference between raw naturalism and poetic realism. The scene of the sleeping sailors is accurate enough, but Eisenstein sees the arabesques that the hammocks form, and he uses these graceful, intersecting curves as a contrast to the turbulence of the waves earlier and the tumultuousness of the mutiny to come. Shortly thereafter, he uses the swinging of the suspended tables in the mess hall in the same way—another moment of irrepressible grace in otherwise rigidly iron surroundings.

Fiercely, electrically, the film charges forward into the confrontation between officers and men, with the action caught in flashes that simultaneously anatomize and unify it—in Eisenstein's double aim to show things as they are yet make us see them as never before. One of his methods, which has been likened to cubism and is a forerunner of a technique Alain Resnais used in *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961), is to show an action and then repeat it immediately from a slightly changed point of view. A celebrated instance of this is the moment when a young sailor smashes a plate on which is inscribed "Give us this day our daily bread." We see his action twice in rapid succession, from two different angles, and the effect is one of intensified or italicized rage.

Eisenstein shot the first and second parts of the film on board *The Twelve Apostles* (of all names for a Soviet vessel!), the surviving sister ship of the *Potemkin* (itself named after Grigory Potemkin, the eighteenth-century general who colonized the sparsely populated steppes of southern Ukraine), which met its demise in 1919 during the Russian Civil War. *The Twelve Apostles* had to be altered somewhat but its use nevertheless gives these sections a steely verisimilitude. (Remember Eisenstein's staging of *Gas Masks*.) When the obdurate sailors are herded together and the tarpaulin thrown over them before they are to be shot—itself an effectively simple, dehumanizing image—the firing squad prepares and then the film cuts away: to a close-up of two cannons, as if to implicate the setting itself, followed by a wishfully serene view of the ship at anchor. Of course this is Griffith's old technique of intercutting to distend a moment of climax, but here it is used to thematic as well as visceral ends.

When at the last moment the firing squad goes over to the sailors' side, in the fight that follows Eisenstein uses another of his favorite devices: synecdoche. After the corrupt ship's doctor is thrown overboard, we see a close-up of his pince-nez dangling from the rigging—the same pince-nez with which he had inspected the maggoty meat and pronounced it edible. The man's corruption and what followed it are caught in that close shot. And there's another such moment. Before the fight, we had seen the ship's priest, one of the clerics whom Eisenstein was constantly caricaturing in his films, lifting his crucifix and bidding the men to obey. During the fight, after the priest has been knocked down a flight of steps, we see a close-up of the crucifix, an edge of its lateral bar stuck in the deck where it has fallen, like an axe

plunged into wood—an axe (Eisenstein implies) that, at least this time, has missed the necks for which it was intended.

The Odessa Steps sequence itself is oceanic. With a few hundred people, Eisenstein creates the sense of an immense, limitless upheaval. With the quick etching of a few killings, he creates more savagery than do thousands of commonplace gory movies. With crosscurrents of perspective and tempo, he evokes the collision of status quo and coming revolution. Here is an additional example of Eisenstein's editing in this sequence, which is a treasury of montage aesthetics. He establishes, by typage, a woman with glasses who protests the soldiers' butchery. Shortly afterward, we see an officer swinging a saber at the camera; then we cut to the woman's face, one lens of her glasses shattered, her eye streaming blood, her features frozen in shock. (The bank teller in *Bonnie and Clyde* [1967] who was shot through a car window is her direct descendant.) The suggestion of the blow's force by ellipsis is masterly enough; but, in the brief moment in which we see the officer swinging his saber at us, totaling less than two seconds, there are *four different shots* of him that, taken together, explode his fury into a horrifying prism.

This episode raises one more point to be made about the Odessa Steps sequence, the whole film. Even when one sees *Battleship Potemkin* without musical accompaniment—which is preferable to most of the scores that have been tacked on to it—when it is seen absolutely silent, the effect, as I've hinted, is of roaring tumult. One strong impulse to the development of montage in the days of silent cinema was the attempt to create visually the effect of sound: shots of train whistles or church bells or door knockers so that you could see what you couldn't hear. But in this film, by the way he counterpoises rhythms and faces, marching boots and firing guns and moving masses, Eisenstein draws from that silent screen a mounting and immense "roar" that has barely been surpassed in sound pictures.

The double vision of *Battleship Potemkin*, subjectivized and also cosmic, is paralleled in its double effect throughout the world. Subjectively, it was made as a celebration for those already fervent about communism; but it was simultaneously intended as propaganda for the earth's unconverted citizenry. Emotionally and aesthetically, if not politically, the film unquestionably has had a great effect: but those who control its distribution have much less faith in it than its maker had. No important picture has been more seriously tampered with. Political messages have been tacked on, fore and aft, on some prints; other prints have been snipped internally; in 1940 in New York, *Battleship Potemkin* was given a filmed prologue and epilogue spoken by American actors. The only music that Eisenstein approved was written by an Austrian, Edmund Meisel, for the Berlin premiere, and this score was rediscovered only in the 1970s. Most prints of the film have some other music ladled on.

In terms of its free growth, Eisenstein's career, finally, describes a curve that coincides with the rise and fall of worldwide radical hope for Soviet communism. But at the height of his faith, he created a film that both proclaimed that faith and transcended it—a work of political fire that lives, that survives, because it is a work of art.

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## FILMOGRAPHY: KEY FILMS OF SOVIET FORMALISM

*Kino-Pravda* (1922–25), directed by Dziga Vertov

*Kino Eye* (1924), directed by Dziga Vertov

*The Extraordinary Adventures of Mr. West in the Land of the Bolsheviks* (1924), directed by Lev Kuleshov

*Strike* (1924), directed by Sergei Eisenstein

*Battleship Potemkin* (1925), directed by Sergei Eisenstein

*Mother* (1926), directed by Vsevolod Pudovkin

*The End of St. Petersburg* (1927), directed by Vsevolod Pudovkin

*October: Ten Days That Shook the World* (1928), directed by Sergei Eisenstein

*Storm over Asia* (1928), directed by Vsevolod Pudovkin

*Arsenal* (1929), directed by Alexander Dovzhenko

*Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), directed by Dziga Vertov

*The General Line*, a.k.a. *Old and New* (1929), directed by Sergei Eisenstein

*Earth* (1930), directed by Alexander Dovzhenko

*Road to Life (*1931), directed by Nikolai Ekk

*Chapaev* (1934), directed by Georgi & Sergei Vasilyev

*The Youth of Maxim* (1935), directed by Grigori Kozintsev & Leonid Trauberg

*The Return of Maxim* (1937), directed by Grigori Kozintsev & Leonid Trauberg

*Bezhin Meadow* (1937), directed by Sergei Eisenstein

*Alexander Nevsky* (1938), directed by Sergei Eisenstein

*The Childhood of Maxim Gorky* (1938), directed by Mark Donskoi

*New Horizons*, a.k.a. *The Vyborg Side* (1939), directed by Grigori Kozintsev & Leonid Trauberg

*On His Own* (1939), directed by Mark Donskoi

*Valery Chkalov* (1941), directed by Mikhail Kalatozov

*Ivan the Terrible, Part I* (1944), directed by Sergei Eisenstein

*Ivan the Terrible, Part II* (1946, released 1958), directed by Sergei Eisenstein

# CHAPTER 3

## Charles Chaplin's *The Gold Rush*



When Charles Chaplin made *The Gold Rush* in 1925, he was thirty-six years old. He had been a world-famous star for about ten years—indeed, he was the twentieth century's first international media superstar, the world's most recognizable figure of *any* sort (Charlot in France, Small Mustache in China). Trotsky said of Céline that he "walked into great literature as other men walk into their homes" (191). The same figure applies to Chaplin and great cinema. The rising young music-hall performer met the film medium as if it had been created for him, and he met the film public as if it had been waiting for him.

Why? Because Chaplin did something to movies that had eluded Mack Sennett, who came before him. No one prior to Sennett had so forcefully revealed the comic effects of motion, of human bodies and machines and inanimate objects, hurtling across the screen and colliding. But Sennett's rapid, pure-motion principle bothered Chaplin, who wanted to add character and individuality to the former's gymnastics. For Sennett, the comic world was a realm of silly surfaces; for Chaplin, the comic world provided the means to examine the serious world (underneath) of human needs and societal structures. For Sennett, comedy was an end; for Chaplin, it was a means.

Before Chaplin, that is, no one had demonstrated that physical comedy could be simultaneously hilariously funny, emotionally passionate, and pointedly intellectual.

Chaplin also did something filmically different from D. W. Griffith, who likewise came before him. Whereas Griffith combined the devices of cinema into a coherent narrative medium, Chaplin advanced the art by making all consciousness of the medium disappear so completely that the audience concentrates on the photographic subject rather than the filmic process. Chaplin's insistence on unobtrusive, middle-distance composition and restrained, seamless editing thus sustains the spell of his performance by producing his hypnotic magic without sleight-of-hand. And while his cinematic technique tended to be invisible—emphasizing the actor and his actions—he gradually evolved a principle of cinema based on framing: finding the exact way to frame a shot so as to reveal its meaning and motion without the necessity of making a disturbing cut. For this reason, Chaplin's films are interesting not for their form but for their *content*—specifically, for his brilliant characterization, through the exquisite art of mime, of the little tramp who is totally at odds with the world around him. It was Chaplin's *presence* in his pictures, then, rather than anything in their formal make-up, that made them interesting, distinguished, and finally important. Put another way, what's vital to Chaplin's art is what he does *on* film rather than what he does *with* it.

Up to 1920 Chaplin had made about seventy films, most of them short and most directed by himself. Only one of them, *Tillie's Punctured Romance* (1914), was feature-length, and it was directed by Sennett. In 1921 Chaplin directed his first feature, *The Kid*, with Jackie Coogan and himself as the Tramp. His next feature, *A Woman of Paris* (1923)—in which he appears only briefly as a station porter—was not a comedy and was a flop. *The Gold Rush* was only Chaplin's second long film about the Tramp; yet he already knew he was dealing with a character who was familiar to everyone, Eskimos and Malayans included. It's rather as if an author had created a world-renowned character through short stories, had written one novel about him, very successfully, and now wanted to take that character further and deeper in a second long work.

Chaplin recounts in his autobiography how he struggled to find an idea for that second feature, insisting to himself: "The next film must be an epic! The greatest!" Nothing came.

> Then one Sunday morning, while spending the weekend at the Fairbankses' [Beverly Hills home], I sat with Douglas after breakfast, looking at stereoscopic views. Some were of Alaska and the Klondike; one a view of the Chilkoot Pass, with a long line of prospectors climbing up over frozen mountains…Immediately ideas and comedy business began to develop, and, although I had no story, the image of one began to grow. (299–300)

The role of the unconscious in creation is still unfathomed, and we can only hypothesize from results. In Chaplin's reaction to those photos, the striking element is unpredictability. Since the first appearance of the Tramp in *Kid Auto Races at Venice* in 1914, he had made very few films that took this character out of contemporary city

or country life, that inserted the Tramp, that is, into a historical context—1918's *Shoulder Arms* comes to mind, if not 1917's *The Immigrant*. Tramps are, after all, a by-product of industry, urban or rural. Evidently (we can deduce after the event) Chaplin's unconscious saw at once, in those stereoscopic pictures, the advantages of the novelty of putting the Tramp into a context that, so to speak, had no direct relation to Tramp-dom, as well as the possibilities for the "epic" that he was seeking. And, presumably, he saw the power in putting the image of the Tramp, whose black moustache is the center of the figure's color gradations, against predominantly white backgrounds. All in all, it was a chance to simultaneously vary and heighten what he had done with the Tramp up to now.

*The Gold Rush* is unique among Chaplin's silent-era films in that he began production with a more or less complete story. (His working methods only fully came to light posthumously, as a result of the outtakes collected and analyzed by Kevin Brownlow and David Gill for their 1983 television mini-series *Unknown Chaplin*. Chaplin, singularly, was able to use the studio as his sketch pad, beginning vaguely with an image and then filming, retaking, undoing, and revising as a story gradually began to take shape, resulting in such extraordinary shooting ratios as *The Kid*'s 53 to 1.) Chaplin had intended to shoot all of the exteriors on location in the Sierra Nevada mountain range, near Truckee, California, but instead much of the picture was filmed on elaborate sets—made from wood, burlap, chicken wire, plaster, salt, and flour—in his studio on the southeast corner of La Brea and Sunset in Hollywood. Production covered seventeen months, from the spring of 1924 to the summer of 1925.

Years later Chaplin told Jean Cocteau that the plot of *The Gold Rush* had grown "like a tree" (*Diaries*, April 11, 1953). Well, it is a remarkably ramified tree, a remarkably complex plot for a film that runs less than ninety minutes—eighty-two, to be exact. The story is a stew of elements drawn from dime novels, Jack London, and nineteenth-century blood-and-thunder melodrama, conventions that at the time of the picture's release were as familiar to audiences as their own homes. By 1925, the Klondike itself had entered the realm of romantic adventure, even though it still lay within living memory. As ever, the Tramp is the little man in a world populated by giants, kin to Till Eulenspiegel, Schweik, Josef K., Happy Hooligan, and Popeye—the audience's surrogate, in other words, amid the confusion of the early twentieth century, before the tide turned toward supermen around the time of World War II.

Here, in brief, is the plot of *The Gold Rush*: Charlie, a prospector in the Alaskan gold rush of 1898, takes refuge from a storm in a lonely, snowbound cabin with another prospector, Big Jim McKay, who has literally been blown in there after making a gold strike. They spend some days of hunger together, after which they go their separate ways. Big Jim then finds a man trying to jump his claim and, in a struggle, is knocked out. He wakes up without any memory of his claim's location.

Charlie, meanwhile, has arrived in a boomtown, has found a job as caretaker of a cabin, and has fallen in love with Georgia, a dance-hall girl. She treats him lightly, since she is in love with a strapping young prospector, until she accidentally discovers how truly smitten the Tramp is. Before Charlie can pursue his love, however, Big Jim wanders into town, still amnesiac about his claim, and seizes Charlie as the sole

means of guiding him back to the lonely cabin and thus the gold. He promises Charlie half the proceeds and drags him off.

They find the cabin and spend the night there, during which the cabin is blown to the edge of a cliff near the claim. (This is a reversal of the earlier device in which Big Jim was blown from the claim to the cabin.) In the morning the two prospectors escape from the cabin just before it slips over the edge—to find themselves right on the site of the gold.

In an epilogue, Charlie and Big Jim, swathed in furs, are on board a ship returning to the United States. (The Tramp sports two fur coats, one atop the other, and one senses that this is less a matter of mere luxury than of banishing cold, including the cold of his immediate past.) For newspaper photos, Charlie puts on his carefully preserved Tramp outfit—and runs into Georgia. She thinks he is still really the Tramp, hides him from the ship's officers who are searching for a stowaway, and offers to pay his fare when they find him. The truth is subsequently revealed about the new millionaire, and Charlie and Georgia are united at the close.

*The Gold Rush* thus takes the Tramp, in his longest outing to date, from rags to riches, combining the pleasure of laughing at his pratfalls with that of vicariously sharing in his eventual good fortune—and what could have more universal appeal? The Tramp—small, innocent, beleaguered, romantic, oblivious, generous, resourceful, courageous, dignified, idealistic—lives inside everyone, but Chaplin made him manifest, with humor that is never cruel, never aggressive, and always speaks to our best selves. Here as elsewhere, the jokes build on situations with which everyone can identify—and quickly raise the stakes. Who doesn't feel an empathetic blush when Charlie's pants start to fall down as he dances with the girl of his dreams? Or breathe a sigh of relief when he finds a convenient rope and manages to slip it around his waist without her noticing? It takes only a beat, however, for everyone to see that a large, hapless dog is tied to the end of that rope and is being swung around the dance floor. And then everyone involuntarily braces for Charlie's inevitable tumble. The sequence occupies only a minute, but in that time, the audience has experienced with near physical intensity a fall, a rise, and another fall—with a wildly unexpected gag planted right in the middle. That combination is Chaplin's basic comedic formula, the DNA of his pictures, and it may be at its best here.

*The Gold Rush*, then, was the comic epic that Chaplin was looking for. But it was epic in a thematic sense as well as a spatial or geographic one. For, in an instance of aesthetic telescoping, Chaplin pointedly chose to make a movie about a late-nineteenth-century gold rush in the middle of the madly moneymaking 1920s. In doing so, he more or less announced his theme, which is the film's consistent indictment of what the pursuit of the material does to the human animal: it makes him an *inhuman* animal. Charlie, the least materialistic of men, has come to the most brazenly materialistic of places, a place where life is hard, dangerous, brutal, uncomfortable, and unkind. The quest for gold perverts nearly all human relationships in *The Gold Rush*, which ever endeavors seriocomically to contrast material and spiritual pursuits, the merely physical or corporeal with the sublimely soulful.

The start of the film strikes Chaplin's usual serious opening note, like the adagio opening measures of a Haydn symphony before the brightness; but Chaplin returns

frequently to seriousness in *The Gold Rush*, something that has always dismayed a few and delighted many. Those first shots are of a long, serpentine line of gold prospectors filing up the snow-filled Chilkoot Pass and are obviously inspired by some of the pictures that Fairbanks showed Chaplin on that Sunday morning. (There have been other films set in the Klondike, but they came after Chaplin's: two examples are Clarence Brown's silent drama *The Trail of '98* [1928] and the sound comedy *Klondike Annie* [1936], starring Mae West.) The Chilkoot Pass sequence is grim; we even see one of the prospectors collapse in the snow while the others trudge heedlessly past him.

Then a title announces "A Lone Prospector," and we see a narrow mountain path on the edge of a steep drop. I always laugh at once at this sight, not just because I know Chaplin is coming *and* the path is dangerous, but also because—separated from the opening only by one title—the scenery is so patently phony compared with the reality of the Pass. Thus, early in the film, Chaplin sets a pattern that weaves throughout: the real world posed against the theater of that world, unblinking reality as the ground for a comic abstract of that reality. It is dangerous to mix modes in this way, of course, unless one is able, as Chaplin is, to make the return to each mode instantly credible and supportive of the other.

Then in the Tramp comes, dancing along with a little pack on his back, with attached pickaxe and frying pan; he wears no overcoat or scarf in freezing weather, only gloves. This first sequence shows the touch that made Chaplin great. As he skips and skids along the narrow path, a gigantic bear appears behind him and follows him. A lesser comic would have turned and seen the bear, and possibly would have got a lot of laughs out of his panic on the slippery path. But the bear disappears into a cave just before Charlie stops to turn around and see how far he come so far. *We* know the danger he has escaped, he doesn't. This is not only funnier, it is also serious, for it exemplifies two of the Tramp's most important qualities: his innocence and his unwitting faith in the power of that innocence.

Later, when the Tramp and Big Jim are trapped and starving in the cabin, the other man, delirious with hunger, imagines that Charlie is a gigantic chicken. (Big Jim is played by Mack Swain, a fat and endearing figure whom James Agee memorably described as looking like "a hairy mushroom" [5], and who made many shorts with Chaplin at Keystone Studios.) The delirium is funny, but Chaplin says he got the idea from the tragic story of the Donner party, California-bound American settlers who were lost in the Sierra Nevada Mountains in the winter of 1846 and resorted to cannibalism in order to stay alive. (Chaplin had read Charles Fayette McGlashan's *History of the Donner Party: A Tragedy of the Sierras*, originally published in 1879; he might also have been partly influenced by Robert Flaherty's documentary film about Eskimo life, *Nanook of the North*, released in 1922.) Grimness as a source of comedy! On this point Chaplin himself said the following in his autobiography: "In the creation of comedy, it is paradoxical that tragedy stimulates the spirit of ridicule, because ridicule, I suppose, is an attitude of defiance: we must laugh in the face of our helplessness against the forces of nature—or go insane" (299).

From the Donner story, too, Chaplin elaborated the famous sequence of the boiled shoe. (Some members of the Donner party roasted and ate their moccasins.)

The two men are so famished that they eat a shoe—the Tramp's, of course. Charlie boils and serves it, and the humor comes not only from what they are eating but also from the way they eat it. A lesser comic inventor might have got laughs by having the Tramp and Big Jim go through grimaces of disgust as they forced themselves to chaw. But, as with the bear incident, Chaplin raises the scene to a higher power, making it funnier by means of poetic imagination. Big Jim, you see, is jealous because the Tramp got the bigger piece, and switches plates. This is funnier than grimaces because it is *truer*. And the Tramp twirls the shoelaces on his fork like spaghetti, then sucks each nail as if it were a tasty little bone. The consolations of fantasy have rarely gone further.

All through Chaplin's body of work, hunger is a recurrent subject of comedy. (One example among many: in *The Circus* [1928], the hungry Tramp steals bites from a child's hot dog over the shoulder of the father who holds the boy in his arms.) Hunger is an inevitable subject for a tramp, particularly one whose creator had a childhood in surroundings, in the London slums, of wretched poverty and extreme hardship. Three times a day, life puts the Tramp at the mercy of "the forces of nature," and three times a day Chaplin has the option of transmuting those forces into laughter for the film audience, if not for Charlie himself, so that all of us will not "go insane." But there is an extraordinary aspect to this theme in *The Gold Rush*. Usually in Chaplin's pictures the pinch of hunger comes from a social stringency: no money. Here in the Klondike cabin, money is irrelevant. Chaplin thus takes the theme that has always had a sociopolitical resonance for him, isolates it into the Thing Itself, and makes it funnier than ever.

The very harmonics of the picture—light tone against dark, light tone arising *out* of dark and vice versa—is enriched by the Tramp's first entrance into the dance hall in the boomtown. Chaplin, the director, avoids the conventional sequence: showing us the bustling saloon and then showing us the Tramp looking at it—which would mean looking at the camera. He shoots past the Tramp (who is in long shot, in the center, lower portion of the screen), from behind, to the saloon interior. Charlie is in outline; the brightness is beyond him. He watches from the edge, the outsider looking in at a crowd that ignores him; and we watch from an edge ever farther behind him. Yet because he is seen from slightly below eye level, there is something strong, almost heroic, in the pathos of the image, and simultaneously, there is something comic in the Tramp's silhouette (particularly as we can see his shoeless right foot wrapped in rags). It is the classic, quintessential Chaplin shot.

But pathos and comedy are heightened in the next moments. A man comes to stand behind Charlie, unseen by him. At the bar the barkeep says to Georgia (if we watch his mouth closely), "There's Charlie." She turns and says, "Charlie," smiles, and comes toward the Tramp. He's mystified but happy—and then she goes right past him to greet the man behind him. Chaplin had used the idea of mistaken greetings before, notably in a two-reeler called *The Cure* (1917), but only to be funny. Here it is funny, but it also crystallizes another matter: the moment of his falling in love despite his forlorn condition.

Georgia is played by Georgia Hale, whom Chaplin had seen in Josef von Sternberg's first film, *The Salvation Hunters* (1925). Her career did not go on long

after *The Gold Rush*, which is odd because her performance is perfect: she supplies exactly the right qualities of sauciness, sex, and tenderness. Hale clearly plays the part with a knowledge of what would now be called the subtext, the meaning below the surface. This dance-hall girl is a prostitute; what else could she possibly be? (One of her friends at the dance hall is a beefy, older woman, with the look of a traditional madam.) Nothing is done or said to explicate this matter; it is simply there for those who can see it, and it deepens the film for them.

Children, as I can remember from my own experience, see the characters in this situation as "innocent." It seems to be another version of the *Petrushka* story (Stravinsky, 1911), in which a haughty soubrette prefers a handsome extrovert and rebuffs the shy man unable to demonstrate the worth that we, the audience, perceive. Adults, however, can see that the other man, the imposing young prospector, has some aspects of a prostitute's "bully." More: when Georgia and the other girls are playing in the snow one day near Charlie's cabin, an outing that accidentally leads to her discovery of his devotion, the sequence recalls the feeling of Maupassant's "Madame Tellier's Establishment" (1881), where we read about the staff of a bordello frisking on holiday. The point of this unseemly subtext is not merely to slip innuendo past the censor. It provides, for those able to see it, a further stratum of reality for the *comedy* and, since the Tramp never recognizes what Georgia in fact is, further proof of his armor of innocence.

In other words, Chaplin deliberately chose to have the world-beloved Tramp fall in love with, and finally win, a prostitute, in an American comedy—seemingly as a tacit certification of the postwar era's changing sexual standards, which complemented America's granting women the right to vote in 1920. The 1920s, after all—the Roaring Twenties or the Jazz Age—were part of the Machine Age between the two world wars: the age, that is, which saw the rise of mass consumption, and with it the mass production of radios, phonographs, automobiles, telephones, and motion pictures. During this period, the common man and woman were getting more and more freedom of an economic as well as political kind, and Chaplin saw that such freedom would inevitably include sexual license as well.

During the "free" Georgia's encounter with Charlie on her outing, he invites her and the other girls to New Year's Eve dinner in his cabin. They accept, knowing that they will not attend. On that evening, Charlie prepares an elaborate table setting and a big meal, then sits down to wait—and wait and wait. At last he nods off at the table and dreams that the guests have come, that all is joyous. In one of the most celebrated moments in all Chaplin films, Charlie at one point entertains the adoring girls (in his dream) by doing the Oceana Roll. Sitting at the table, he sticks two forks into two sabot-shaped rolls, then kicks and jigs them as if they were his legs and he were doing a chorus-girl dance. (An earlier version of Chaplin's iconic dance of the rolls can be seen in the Fatty Arbuckle silent comedy *The Rough House* [1917].) Every time I see this sequence coming, I think, "I know every move he's going to make. He can't possibly make me laugh again." And every time he does. One reason, deduced from my last viewing, is that Chaplin does not merely kick his fork "legs": he uses his whole body behind the forks, his utter concentration, in pinpoint reproduction of a chorus girl's performance. And typical of *The Gold Rush*'s complex harmonics, this

hilarious pantomime occurs in a dream into which the Tramp has fallen because he has been tricked and disappointed.

The dream dinner, I should also note, exemplifies another theme that runs through Chaplin's work, the mirror image of the hunger theme discussed earlier. Instead of hunger, we get here the opposite extreme, the feast, the laden table, which has an effect in Chaplin films like that of feasts in the novels of Dickens (another man who knew poverty in London). Plentiful food means, not gluttony, but love: an atmosphere of community, conviviality, and affection. One of the most touching moments in *The Kid*, for example, is the huge breakfast that the Kid prepares for himself and his "father," the Tramp. In *The Gold Rush*, the golden brown turkey at the New Year's Eve dinner is the Tramp's contribution to an atmosphere in which human beings can be human. Chaplin's idea of a low and dehumanized state is not hunger, then, but the insult to the full table that occurs when no humans, or not enough humans, are present. In *Modern Times* (1936), the Tramp is strapped to an automatic feeding machine—with food enough, that is, but without feeling. The result is the debasement of a daily joy.

Such pantomime as we see in the dance of the rolls is evidence, moreover, of the fact that Chaplin, like Buster Keaton, groomed his skills on the theatrical stage—specifically, in the British music hall—before he started making longer films, in the 1920s, in which he attempted to blend slapstick with traditional narrative. Chaplin, however, remained much more closely wed to his popular, vaudevillian entertainment roots than Keaton did. In Chaplin's films we see music-hall gags like the Oceana Roll transferred to the screen fairly intact; his routines thus retain much of their original scale and style. He rarely uses film to enlarge the physical scale of his gags by including the extended real world, as Keaton does. On the contrary, Chaplin brings in the camera so as to focus more closely on smaller-scale gags, precisely of the kind exemplified by the dance of the rolls. While Keaton's camera captures his body in relationship to a very real and potent world, Chaplin's camera tends, by contrast, to isolate him from the world so that we can revel in the charm and physical grace of his performance.

One need only think of each comedian's most famous gag to understand this basic distinction: again, the Oceana Roll from *The Gold Rush* and the falling-wall sequence from Keaton's *Steamboat Bill, Jr.* (1928). In the former, Chaplin executes a classic transformation gag as he spears the two dinner rolls with forks and moves the forks and rolls as if they were a pair of dancing legs. The scene is captured in a medium shot (almost a close-up) of Charlie at a dinner table, and the closeness of the camera allows him to emphasize the delicate motions of the dancing rolls. This scene is emblematic of Chaplin's approach to transferring his vaudeville to film, for he uses film here to bring the audience closer to the action. He also achieves greater emotional intimacy through his use of medium shots and close-ups, a shot selection that supports his somewhat sentimental narratives as well as his fine, detailed gag work—in which Chaplin gets his laughter less from the gag itself than from his genius for what may be called inflection, or the perfect, changeful shading of his physical and mental attitudes *toward* the gag.

Conversely, Keaton's trademark gag, the falling wall, evinces a different aesthetic. Rather than moving the camera closer for greater detail and intimacy,

Keaton pulls it back in order to capture Buster's relationship to the environment around him. While Chaplin uses medium shots and close-ups to create audience empathy for the plight of the Tramp, Keaton prefers to use the long shot to create a larger picture—one that visually exceeds the boundaries of his body. In this way Keaton projects his comic vision onto the world rather than keep that vision contained within his own character, as does Chaplin. Particularly in his films' climactic sequences, Keaton's use of extreme long shots provides the audience with greater psychic distance from his character, a quality that is amplified by his understated acting style. (Luis Buñuel himself commended this aspect of Keaton's work when he designated him "the great specialist in fighting sentimental inflections of all kinds" [110].) Whereas Chaplin usually concludes his feature films with a catharsis naturally deriving from his narrative (as in the union of Georgia and Charlie at the end of *The Gold Rush*, or the close-up of the tearful Tramp at the end of *City Lights* [1931]), in keeping with his concern to develop the emotional aspects of his story rather than explore film's ability to expand the visual realm or physical scale of his comedy, Keaton frequently neglects to provide the emotional release of a sentimental ending. Instead, he resolves his films in physical chases executed on the grandest possible scale, and depends for dramatic closure on the fulfillment of his acrobatic grace rather than on the audience's psychological identification with his character.

Let me now describe one more scene in *The Gold Rush*—although it is hard to limit oneself—as an instance of Chaplin's comic distinctiveness and invention. When Charlie and Big Jim wake up in the lonely cabin to which they have returned in their search for Jim's lost claim, they do not realize, of course, that during the night the cabin was blown to a new location: the very edge of a cliff. They are unable to see out the frost-covered windows. As the cabin begins to shift on the precipice, Charlie decides to have a look at the trouble. He opens the back door—and swings out into immense (studio-created) space, hanging for dear life onto the doorknob. (If I had to vote for the single funniest sight gag in films, I would probably choose this moment.) Big Jim pulls the Tramp back inside. Then comes a sequence in which the two men, one slight and the other burly, try to inch their way up the increasingly slanted floor toward the safe side and the front door. It is a pearl of invisible dynamics, in which they cautiously *will* their bodies upward—a monument to spirit-flesh dichotomy.

Like so much in Chaplin's films, and in farce generally, this cabin sequence is built on danger, scary but seen from the safety of relatively distant shots. We are dealing here with the quantum of the banana peel greatly multiplied: we know how it would feel if it were happening to us, but we also know that it is not happening to us. "Long shot for comedy, close-up for tragedy," was one of Chaplin's most famous pronouncements (Gehring, *Chaplin's War Trilogy*, 77). The proxemics principles are sound, for when we are close to a dangerous or risky action—a person slipping on the proverbial banana peel, for example—it is seldom funny, for we are concerned for the individual's safety. If we see the same event from a greater distance, however, it often strikes us as comical. Chaplin used close-ups sparingly for this very reason. So long as the Tramp remains in long shots, the audience tends to be amused by his crazy antics, absurd predicaments, and breathtaking brushes with danger.

Comedy of all kinds, then, depends on perception and (superior) vantage point. In high comedy, which usually deals with social criticism, we can recognize the hypocrisy or vanity or whatever it may be, acknowledge secretly that we share it, and laugh with relief that it is being pilloried in someone else. In farce, the materials are often physical, and are often the dangers of daily life that surround us all the time, even when we are crossing the street; action leads to objects, that is to say, and they frequently defeat the characters, or at least momentarily impede them. But the *farceur* makes injury and possible death simultaneously real and unreal. We know, for example, that the Tramp and Big Jim will not be killed in the cabin—it simply could not happen in this kind of picture; yet we feel the danger they experience in our own viscera. We are frightened at the same time that we enjoy the skill of artists who have nullified extinction. Farce characters—important ones—never get killed. (Three men do die in *The Gold Rush*, however: the villainous prospector Black Larsen and the two lawmen he kills.) These figures contrive for the audience a superiority over mortality, even as they make us laugh at their struggles to escape it.

To this farcical heritage of danger combined with subconscious assurance of safety, Chaplin adds two unique touches, each of which I alluded to earlier. The first is feeling. Most farces turn their characters into objects akin to the objects, or things, that are contriving to defeat them; that is, farce usually dehumanizes its ostensibly human figures as they pursue short-terms goals and immediate gratification. But Chaplin combines farce with feeling in *The Gold Rush* (as he began to do, in feature-length form, with *The Kid*), for Georgia and his other fellow human beings—and for animals, as well (Black Larsen's dog in the cabin at the start of the film, for one). He also combines farce with physical grace, the second Chaplin touch. All through his career it is manifest, as in the dangerous skating sequences of both the early short *The Rink* (1916) and the later feature *Modern Times*. One of the most famous remarks about Chaplin was made by W. C. Fields, who, with salty verbal ornament, declared that Charlie was "the best ballet dancer that ever lived" (Taylor, 19). What Fields omitted is that the ballet in this instance is often performed in the face of death.

The finish of *The Gold Rush* strengthens and resolves the light-dark harmonics of the whole, of the grace and feeling displayed by Charlie in the face of denigration, danger, and death. Some have objected to the ending because it is contrived to be happy, because the Tramp does not walk unaccompanied down the isolated road at the end. But, as a matter of fact, that lonely walk is not the typical conclusion of his feature films: *The Kid*, *City Lights*, and *Modern Times* also end happily. (As for Chaplin's shorts, *The Bank* [1915], *The Vagabond* [1916], *A Dog's Life* [1918], and *Shoulder Arms* all end with either the suggestion or the revelation that the Tramp's attainment of marital happiness has all been a dream.) For *The Gold Rush*, if the end was to be happy, it meant, because of the subject matter in this case, that Charlie had to end up rich. Even this is not much different from *The Kid*, which finishes with the Tramp going into the rich woman's house to join her and the Kid, presumably to stay.

*The Gold Rush* differs only in that we *see* Charlie rich, though the logic of the character demands that he come to his money fortuitously, not through his own efforts. (Indeed, we never even see the Tramp prospecting in this film about the Alaskan gold rush, and the only time we see him do work-for-pay, it is for the sake of

others: he shovels snow in town in order to make money to buy provisions for the New Year's Eve dinner he is hosting.) Essential though the wealth is thematically, this was not the image that Chaplin wanted to leave before our eyes, so he devised a way for the rich Charlie to don his Tramp clothes once again—in a scene arranged so that Georgia thinks the Tramp is a stowaway and offers to pay for his passage, before she finds out about his money. The Tramp persona, thus resumed, gives Georgia, the prostitute, a chance to prove the genuineness of her feelings, and it gives Chaplin a chance to score a last point. To wit: the Tramp had to be dragged away from Georgia by Big Jim, had to be dragged to wealth, as it were; now that wealth brings the lovers together again on the ship returning to the States. Money and happiness, Chaplin seems to say, are at the whim of two powers: fate and *auteurs*.

But an even subtler harmonic complexity runs through the film, through most of Chaplin's major films. The element that persists, through the comedy and through the pathos that makes the comedy beloved, is a sense of mystery. No job can more than temporarily chain the Tramp to a routine; no luxuries can seduce him into settling down; no ideology can trap him into conformity; and no psychological past, no personal history, can circumscribe him. Who *is* the Tramp, then? What is the secret of his unique effect on us?

Consider: here is a prospector who appears on a mountain trail wearing a winged collar and tie. We never question this; we never even really notice it. All right, perhaps that is because the Tramp's costume has by now become an internationally accepted set of symbols. After he gets a job of sorts (as the cabin-caretaker) in the boomtown, the Tramp, who has been collarless for a while, again has a collar and tie. Even though this is a rough Alaskan town, again we don't even notice the improbability, if not impossibility, of his outfit. When, early in *The Gold Rush*, Charlie and Big Jim are snowbound and starving in the cabin, Jim's whiskers grow and the Tramp's do not. Who is the little fellow?

But then the Tramp's characteristics move from costume into action, and we really begin to wonder. When Georgia invites him to dance in his silly clothes and with one foot still wrapped in rags to replace the eaten shoe, he dances with exquisite style. Who *is* he? When the Tramp invites the girls to dinner, he not only knows how to cook, he also knows all about table settings, party favors, dainty giftwrappings, and etiquette. Who *is* he? When he performs the Oceana Roll, he knows a chorus-girl routine. Who *is* he? When Georgia's bullyboy tries to force his way into her room against her will, Charlie bars the door to the hulking man with a knightly chivalry that is contemptuous of the danger to himself. Again—who *is* he?

I propose no supernatural answer, that the Tramp is a divine messenger in ragged clothes, a fool of God. I do suggest that part of the genius of Chaplin, part of his superiority to all other film comics except Buster Keaton, is his ability to make us believe in a comic character whose standards are better than our own, just as his body in motion is more beautiful than our bodies. I suggest that one of the reasons we have loved him all these decades—and young people seem to feel that *they* have loved him for decades, too—is that he has concentrated not on merely making us laugh, but on showing us the funniness in a clownlike hero who is an unsententious agent of exemplary values. Charlie is not dully angelic, to be sure; he sometimes pulls off con

games, though usually to a good end or to flout oppressive authority. But in the main he compensates for the shortcomings, social and physical, of our lives and beings. In his magical movement and in his moral code, even in his survivalist cunning, he is what we feel we ought to be.

"Chaplin's Tramp," wrote Robert Warshow,

> …represented the good-hearted and personally cultivated individual in a heartless and vulgar society. The society was concerned only with the pursuit of profit, and often not even with that so much as with the mere preservation of the ugly and impersonal machinery by which the profit was gained; the Tramp was concerned with the practice of personal relations and the social graces. Most of all the Tramp was like an aristocrat fallen on hard times, for what he attempted in all his behavior was to maintain certain standards of refinement and humanity, to keep life dignified and make it emotionally and aesthetically satisfying. (177)

The Tramp, then, is the man who stands apart, the exceptional individual misunderstood and rejected by the society around him, a better grade of human being whose unfitness for the tasks of that society only underscores his personal superiority, his interest in higher things.

Although Chaplin's films carry an implied social protest, an appeal for change, he does not propose his character as any sort of revolutionary, for the Tramp would be as unfit to take action against society as he is to work within its constrictions. Moreover, he is too insular to show much solidarity with the poor, and too singular to be regarded as typical of them. We are to side with Charlie for his intrinsic *human* qualities, for what he is in himself, apart from anything he does or could do or anything he stands for beyond himself. His strongest bond is with us, the spectators, rather than with any of the other characters in his films: he communicates with the audience in a kind of intense isolation, to borrow Louise Brooks's phrase (Card, 240), tacitly addressing us with an entreaty to recognize his fine qualities and the injustice of a society that does not. Sometimes he gets the girl, it's true, but never as a result of his having undertaken any conventional courtship: the Tramp gets her because she, like us, is sensitive enough to appreciate his personal worth. If society at large will not accommodate the Tramp, that is for Chaplin sufficient reason to condemn it, and he concentrates our attention on his character's unique individual qualities, upholding them—as he does so brilliantly in *The Gold Rush*—against an order that callously discounts them.

Bertolt Brecht wrote in 1926 that he himself went to see *The Gold Rush* only after some delay, because it had made his theater friends despondent about the theater. He reports that the picture made him share their despondency, but not because he feels there is a hierarchical difference between the arts of theater and film. The difference is Chaplin. Brecht says that Chaplin is an artist who "already qualifies as a historical event" (5). Yes. *The Gold Rush* is a marvel, and it is Chaplin himself who is the event in art.

Chaplin disposed of the Tramp in the 1930s with the onset of the Depression and the run-up to the horrors of the Second World War, and one of the reasons may have been the trait of sentiment or heightened feeling in the character. One suspects that Chaplin fest restive or out of sync under this restriction, as well as others imposed on him by the figure of the Tramp. After his last Charlie film, *Modern Times*, and *The Great Dictator* (1940), in which he played a barber who still preserved some of the qualities of the Tramp, Chaplin produced *Monsieur Verdoux* (1947). Verdoux murders women for their money. He is thus the complete opposite of the Tramp, like an alter ego of Charlie avenging himself on the opposite sex.

Another reason for the disappearance of the Tramp was the advent of sound in the cinema. Language may be the means of conveying ambiguities of emotion and shadings of feeling in relationships, but above all it is the means of communicating intellectual ideas. But the Tramp, no less complicated than Verdoux, is not a thinker (though Chaplin's films, particularly *The Gold Rush*, contain ideas or themes), and language, through sound in the sound film, requires thought, or one could say that language and thought naturally go together. Only through pantomime can the Tramp express himself, express his emotions. That is his limitation—and his glory.

*The Gold Rush* remains today the highest-grossing silent comedy. When it was originally released in England, BBC Radio broadcast ten solid minutes of audience laughter from the premiere. When the film opened in Berlin, one sequence—the famous dance of the rolls—was so wildly received that it was run back and played again, a rare instance of a cinematic encore. Contributing to *The Gold Rush*'s fame, ironically, was its banning by Goebbels in 1935 because it did not "coincide with the world philosophy of the present day in Germany" ("Newsreel," 2), in addition to the fact that Chaplin had been caricatured in various anti-Semitic publications as the archetypical Jew, even though he was not Jewish. "Jewish," for the propagandists, meant crafty and inventive and possessed of all the unheroic advantages of the underdog—just the resources that Chaplin's screen character had so often availed himself of.

Yet by 1942, despite Goebbels' inadvertent endorsement, Chaplin nonetheless felt compelled to reissue *The Gold Rush* for an audience that—only seventeen years after the picture's initial release, and only six since the defiantly (near) silent *Modern Times*—had mostly never seen a silent movie. There was no television then, after all, and no revival houses to make such a cinematic work available again. He therefore chose to guide the audience through the experience by means of an explicit musical score and an orotund narration—in Chaplin's own voice—that is drawn from the same half-remembered well of Victorian instruction as, say, Edward Everett Horton's later voice-over for Jay Ward's animated *Fractured Fairy Tales* shorts (1959–63).

Chaplin also eliminated a subplot (the bounder Jack's cruel hoax in which he fools the Tramp into thinking that Georgia has written him a conciliatory letter) from the 1942 version of *The Gold Rush*, as well as the scene in which, once settled in the boomtown, the Tramp sells his prospector's equipment. In addition, he truncated the ending (the Tramp does not kiss Georgia and thereby elicit the photographers' extra-cinematic comment that "You've spoiled the picture"), which perhaps did suffer from romantic overload as a result of Chaplin's liaison, in real life, with Georgia Hale. But

very little is finally sacrificed from the film; there is no real downside. (This was, moreover, Chaplin's preferred version.) The re-release of *The Gold Rush* helpfully came in the middle of World War II; it helped extend Chaplin's franchise to another generation; and, perhaps most importantly, it helped preserve the footage of the original, which remains as crystal-clear, economical, and direct as anything ever committed to celluloid.

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FILMOGRAPHY: KEY AMERICAN SILENT FILM COMEDIANS
& THEIR COMEDIES

Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle: *Life of the Party* (1920); *Leap Year* (1921); *Gasoline Gus* (1921).

Charles Chaplin: *The Kid* (1921); *The Gold Rush* (1925); *The Circus* (1928); *City Lights* (1931).

Buster Keaton: *The Navigator* (1924); *Sherlock, Jr.* (1924); *The General* (1927); *Steamboat Bill, Jr.* (1928).

Harold Lloyd: *Safety Last* (1923); *Why Worry?* (1923); *The Freshman* (1925).

Harry Langdon: *The Strong Man* (1926); *Tramp, Tramp, Tramp* (1926); *Long Pants* (1927).

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## Josef von Sternberg's *The Blue Angel*



In 2001, seventy-one years after it became world-famous, after it made its leading woman world-famous, we got the full-length original version of *The Blue Angel* (*Der blaue Engel*, 1930). The American premiere of this restoration was in New York. The original version is only twelve minutes longer than the print first shown in the United States in December of 1930, but those few restored brief sequences, along with the fresh print and the sharp new subtitles, give us the chance to see an extraordinary work at its best.

*The Blue Angel* is a cask of contradictions. The first German sound film, it was made in Berlin in 1929, and is sometimes considered the ultimate flowering of the great German cinema of the 1920s; but the director, Josef von Sternberg, was technically an American. He was an Austrian émigré who had lived in America since he was seventeen (at the time of the movie he was thirty-five), had served in the U.S. Army during World War I, had succeeded in Hollywood, and was no longer fluent in

the German language. Emil Jannings, the German star who had worked in Hollywood with Sternberg in a silent picture and had returned home (like many foreign actors) because his accent barred him from American sound films, had sworn that he would never work with this director again; yet it was Jannings, facing his first sound film at home, who asked Sternberg to come over and direct him—even though Sternberg had made only one sound film (and, oddly enough, the first gangster film, *Underworld* [1927]—in silence). During the making of *The Blue Angel*, Jannings and Sternberg quarreled bitterly, yet the film contains some of the best work of each. Marlene Dietrich, the leading woman, was publicized as a Sternberg discovery, but she had already been in nine films and in numerous Berlin plays. (It was on the Berlin stage that Sternberg first saw her.) The screenplay is based, rather loosely, on a 1905 novel by Heinrich Mann, and Sternberg maintained that, despite the final credits that cite three German writers (including the comic playwright Carl Zuckmayer) in addition to himself, he was the real adapter of the book.

Let's start our discussion with Emil Jannings. In 1930 he was Germany's best-known actor. After briefly immigrating to Hollywood, he garnered the first Academy Award for Best Actor with his performances in two films: *The Way of All Flesh* (1927, dir. Victor Fleming) and *The Last Command* (1928). The latter was an outrageously melodramatic offering from Paramount, directed by one of Hollywood's most colorful, most talented, and most disliked men—Sternberg, a man who once remarked that the way to get others to remember you is to get them to hate you. According to Sternberg's autobiography, *Fun in a Chinese Laundry* (1965), he and Jannings managed to end their collaboration on the film gracefully, but the actor William Powell, who was also in *The Last Command*, was more adamant in expressing his opinion of Sternberg. He demanded a clause in his contract that would protect him from ever being directed by the diminutive Austrian émigré again.

When Sternberg arrived in Berlin to direct Jannings' first sound film for UFA (Universum-Film Aktiengesellschaft), he learned that there was no screenplay—not even an idea for one. Various subjects, including Rasputin, were mooted. Then Jannings brought him the Mann novel. Sternberg must have recognized that the story was the sort of drama that Jannings had already scored in, the proud man who suffers a tragic fall (the grand hotel doorman in F. W. Murnau's *The Last Laugh* [1924], the banker in Fleming's *The Way of All Flesh*, the czarist general in Sternberg's *The Last Command*), but Sternberg also saw the gleaming cinematic possibilities in the book for himself as well as Jannings. He then found the woman, the new Lilith, who was essential to this story.

A screen test of Dietrich (at age twenty-eight) for the role is being shown as prelude to the new version of *The Blue Angel*. She stands facing us behind an upright piano, her arms on it, her chin on her hands in parodic coquette pose, and sings "You're the Cream in My Coffee"—in perfectly acceptable English. Twice she sings it, and twice she breaks off to excoriate the pianist in German. With piercing hindsight, we can see at once that she was perfect for Lola-Lola. (Note: as was common with many films in many countries in those days, *The Blue Angel* was shot in two languages simultaneously. After a scene was done in German, it was immediately

repeated in English. It was the [inferior] English version that was first shown in the United States.)

The now legendary status of *The Blue Angel* is traceable not only to its impact on global audiences as one of the earliest sound masterpieces, but also to its role in making Dietrich a star and, ultimately, nothing less than a cultural myth. With her husky voice, "perfect" legs, and distinctive beauty, Dietrich's appearance in the film catapulted her to international stardom. Yet her physical attributes had been displayed in earlier films. In *The Blue Angel*, however, Dietrich projected something more, a personality, a *persona* that fascinated audiences and marked the beginning of her collaboration with Sternberg, the man who became known as the Svengali to her Trilby, the Pygmalion to her Galatea. She would go on to make six films in Hollywood with him—*Morocco* (which, in 1930, demonstrated Dietrich's appeal to American audiences before the début in the U.S. of *The Blue Angel*), *Dishonored* (1931), *Shanghai Express* (1932), *Blonde Venus* (1932), *The Scarlet Empress* (1934), and *The Devil Is a Woman* (1935)—perhaps the most remarkable collaboration between actress and filmmaker that the cinema has ever seen.

It was against the objections of both Jannings and producer Erich Pommer that Sternberg chose Dietrich to play Lola-Lola. (Heinrich Mann's friend Trude Hesterberg was considered; so were the stage actress Grete Massine, the singer Lucie Mannheim, Brigitte Helm from *Metropolis* [1927, dir. Fritz Lang], and even the lesser-known Käthe Haack.) Dietrich was familiar to German audiences through her recordings as well as her stage work and movies, in addition to her highly publicized relationship with the Austrian film star Willi Forst, but Sternberg's *The Blue Angel* crystallized aspects of her personality and talent that had not been exploited in her previous pictures, such as *Die Frau nach der man sich sehnt* (*Three Loves*, 1929; dir. Curtis Bernhardt), where she is sufficiently compelling (and attractive) as a *femme fatale* but physically awkward and often embarrassingly unsure of herself in her acting. In *The Blue Angel* Dietrich was transformed into a performer whose seamless portrayal of her character astounded critics, dismayed her co-star, and mesmerized audiences.

As for Heinrich Mann's novel *Professor Unrath* (in German, *Unrat*), it tells the story of a *Gymnasium* (a college-preparatory high school) teacher whose fascination with a lower-class aspiring singer/entertainer leads to his dismissal from his post. He avenges himself on the class system that he blames for his fate by turning his house into a gambling den and using his new wife to take down the town's social elite. The novel, then, is essentially an attack on the period's reactionary politics and a protest against the false morality and corrupt values of the German middle class. Mann's "message" is that the respectable bourgeoisie is conformist and law-abiding only by default, that is, because of a lack of imagination and courage; deep inside, however, each bourgeois is a gambler and a rake. But Sternberg insisted on largely depoliticizing this narrative and, cutting the novel in half (though adding a number of minor characters like the clown), focused only on the bourgeois professor's surrender to an actual cabaret singer—a beautiful female member of the *Lumpenproletariat* (whose name was changed from Rosa Fröhlich to Lola-Lola) with no aspirations except momentary pleasure—and his destruction at her hands. The professor's

sadistically sociopathic rebellion against the bourgeoisie is totally eliminated from the movie adaptation, even as Sternberg later eliminated Theodore Dreiser's social commentary from his 1931 film of *An American Tragedy*.

Jannings' choice of Sternberg to direct *The Blue Angel*, it has to be said, was not an impulsive one. As difficult a director as actors might find him, Sternberg had already proven his adept, innovative handling of sound film, that nemesis of many a silent-picture star; and Jannings' own success in *The Last Command*, though a silent film, was also an indicator of Sternberg's ability to evoke critically acclaimed performances from his players, as beleaguered as they might feel under his direction. Sternberg's experiments with sound in *Thunderbolt* (1929) and *The Blue Angel* reflected his belief that sound was a liability to the visual expressiveness of the medium. To Sternberg, film had to break the boundaries of simple reproduction or mimesis, of merely imitating the world as it existed, including its sounds. The artistic potential in sound, to be sure, was technically difficult to achieve in the years immediately following its 1927 feature-film début. Indeed, many filmmakers were content to treat sound as a device over which they had little control. But Sternberg, for his part, refused to abdicate control.

As a result, critics and audiences alike were captivated by the subtleties of sound in *The Blue Angel*. Sound was used to achieve a sense of space, of distance, and of the events occurring offscreen, beyond the camera's reach. Sound was also used in this film to establish character and to create atmosphere. Amid the incessant babbling of many contemporaneous movies that filled every moment with talk or music, *The Blue Angel* also distinguished itself through its use of expressive silence. Ironically, Sternberg was later lambasted by critics for being decadently obsessed with visuals to the point, some said, of no longer being a director but a cinematographer instead: his innovative use of sound was quickly forgotten. Critics of Sternberg's work in the 1930s for Paramount also cited his preoccupation with Dietrich as a key factor in his artistic decline. Indeed, by the end of 1935, and the end of their seven-picture collaboration, Dietrich would be regarded by Paramount as a more highly valued "property" than Sternberg, the man who "discovered" her.

That Dietrich would become a preoccupation for Sternberg is first revealed in *The Blue Angel*, where Professor Immanuel Rath (Jannings) is a less central character in comparison with his role in Mann's novel. The first shot of the film demonstrates Sternberg's change of dramatic focus: a poster of Dietrich as Lola-Lola advertises her appearance at the Blue Angel Cabaret. In Mann's novel, the would-be singer becomes only a pawn in her husband's schemes. In Sternberg's film, Lola-Lola's sexual autonomy and Rath's self-abnegating desire for her lead to the latter's social as well as sexual humiliation. It could be argued, however, that Lola-Lola does not destroy Rath (spelled "Raat" in Mann's novel); he destroys himself by choosing to take up with her. This theme of male self-annihilation, moreover, appears repeatedly in Sternberg's pictures, and, already visible in such silent films of his as *The Exquisite Sinner* (1926), *The Docks of New York* (1928), and *The Case of Lena Smith* (1929), it continued to be seen—subsequent to his work with Dietrich—in *The Shanghai Gesture* (1941) and *Macao* (1952).

*The Blue Angel*'s story is, if not especially novel, classically simple and strong. From a shot of a cleaning woman's imitation of Lola-Lola's leggy pose in the poster, the film moves to introduce Professor Immanuel Rath. The middle-aged Rath, a bachelor living a routine existence in an unnamed seaport town, is observed as he prepares for school. At breakfast, he whistles to his pet canary. When it does not respond, he discovers that the bird is dead; he cradles it in his hand. Sternberg eschews maudlin background music here: Rath's concern is accompanied only by silence. His sympathy for his pet is cut short when his maid enters the apartment. She curtly remarks on the bird's demise and unceremoniously carts it off to the nearest stove for incineration. Rath just sits, absentmindedly stirring into his coffee the lump of sugar meant originally as a treat for his pet. The scene then ends.

While the introduction to Rath establishes his capacity for feeling and his emotional vulnerability (as well as the feminine harshness of the world he inhabits), the next scene establishes another aspect of Rath that is developed at length in Mann's novel but is sublimated in Sternberg's film to the theme of sexual obsession: his tyrannizing of his all-male class at the high school. Through vocal inflection and facial expression, Jannings communicates this teacher's enjoyment in humiliating his students. They are terrified of him. Rath catches one student, Lohmann, with a risqué photo card of Lola-Lola, complete with a feathered skirt that conveniently blows up to reveal considerably more of the singer. Angst, the class pet, looks on approvingly as Rath berates Lohmann, but Angst is later tripped up by Lohmann and two other students, after which Angst's own sexy Lola-Lola cards spill out of one of his textbooks onto the floor. Rath then interrogates Angst (a scene that is cut out of some prints) to learn that Lohmann and Goldstaub will be at the Blue Angel that night. As Rath surreptitiously blows on Lola-Lola's feathered photos, music from the cabaret provides a sound transition to the next scene.

Ostensibly outraged that this nightclub allows his students to enter, Rath goes there to protest. (All of us amateur Freudians know at once why he is really going there.) As faraway foghorns sound from the harbor, Rath makes his way to the Blue Angel through narrow, cobblestoned streets dwarfed by crooked, ominously leaning buildings that look as if they came from the expressionist classic *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920). Once in the cabaret, Rath gets confused by all the decorative netting and cables. (These are a Sternberg trademark, used by this director, along with low-hung lamps, to fill the "dead space" that separates the camera from its subject, and the subject from its background, so that he could achieve the gradations of light necessary to fill the screen as he wished, giving it, in this case, an air of scented, smoky claustrophobia and of a milieu where the persistence interference of mute objects is akin to the loosening of base instincts.) The professor soon becomes the object of attention when Lola-Lola turns a spotlight on him as she sings about finding the right man. Then, spotting Goldstaub and Lohmann, Rath quickly chases them—backstage, into Lola-Lola's dressing room.

Shortly thereafter Lola-Lola herself comes backstage. Rath pompously introduces himself, but she quickly deflates his superior manner by chiding him for not taking off his hat. Other performers, including a mournful, ever-watchful clown, pass through the room as Rath accuses Lola-Lola of corrupting his students. At the same time, she

brazenly undresses in front of him and coyly teases the professor, even to the point of dropping her panties on him as she stands on a staircase leading to her bedroom. Lola-Lola soon leaves to sing her next number. A flustered Rath then meets Kiepert (Kurt Gerron), the magician-leader of the entertainment troupe currently in residence at the Blue Angel. Meanwhile, Goldstaub—hiding behind a dressing screen—attempts to escape the room. Rath pursues him and the other students into the street.

The next night, Professor Rath returns to the Blue Angel to retrieve his hat (let's have a Freudian smile) and return Lola-Lola's panties (put into his pocket by Goldstaub). Warned of their teacher's approach, Lohmann, Ertzum, and Goldstaub hide in a cellar that has a trapdoor to Lola-Lola's dressing room. Rath hears her sing one of her songs (marvelous songs that Friedrich Holländer wrote for the picture), then Lola-Lola calculatingly seduces him. She sits Rath down beside her at her dressing table and asks him to hold a box of mascara. Smiling at her guest, she suddenly spits into the mascara before applying it to her eyelashes. Lola-Lola's unself-conscious coarseness or vulgarity and easy sexuality here contrast with the bourgeois pretentiousness and romantic naïveté of Rath. So romantically naïve is he that he soon finds himself defending Lola-Lola against a drunken sea captain who assumes, upon prompting from Kiepert, that she is sexually available. Rath promptly boxes Kiepert's ears and throws the captain out.

When Professor Rath discovers his three students in hiding, he is surprised by their reaction. Lohmann is defiant because, as he says, they are all after the same ting (meaning Lola-Lola). Rath indignantly shoves him and assuages his own overexcitement by drinking champagne. The next morning, he awakens in Lola-Lola's bed. Their breakfast scene together finds her solicitous of Rath's welfare—and Rath still rather confused. He hurries off to class, where his students greet him with shouts of "Unrath," meaning "excrement" or "garbage," and a chalkboard full of suggestive pictures linking their teacher to Lola-Lola. The headmaster arrives and restores order to the classroom, but he warns his colleague against forming a relationship with Lola-Lola. Rath defiantly proclaims his intention to marry the woman, after which the headmaster tells him that he cannot keep his position at the school if he does so.

When Rath appears at the Blue Angel to propose, Lola-Lola is getting ready to leave for the next town and the next cabaret. At first shocked by his marriage proposal, she finally reacts with laughter and amusement. The film then carefully establishes through dialogue and acting that Lola-Lola is actually attracted to Rath because of his innocence and "sweetness." A joyful wedding celebration ensues, after which Rath's staunch declaration that the obscene photo cards of Lola-Lola will never be sold again is gradually forgotten. The passage of time finds Lola-Lola still singing, but a much-changed Rath—a kind of obese poodle traveling with the show in which his wife stars—is now hawking the photo cards. Five years pass, as his dishevelment and despair increase. Rath is even seen applying clown makeup in a visual echo of the sadly silent clown's presence in earlier scenes. When Kiepert announces that the troupe is going to play the Blue Angel again and that Professor Rath will be a featured performer before his hometown audience, Rath is panic-stricken. He says that he will never do it.

Like the beginning of the film, the next scene opens with a poster of Lola-Lola. A sign pasted on the poster announces the "Personal Appearance of Professor Immanuel Rath." Upon the troupe's arrival at the Blue Angel, Lola-Lola flirts with Mazeppa (Hans Albers), a handsome young strongman whose engagement at the cabaret is ending. But because of Lola-Lola, he decides to stay. Rath watches the strongman and his wife as he moves onto the stage for his final humiliation. In the act in which Rath takes part, Kiepert uses him as the stooge for his magic tricks, as he once used the clown. Kiepert declares Rath's head to be "quite empty." A man in the audience, disgusted by the callousness of the proceedings, decides to leave. Kiepert then pulls eggs from Rath's hat and breaks one on the professor's forehead, after which Rath crows on demand in a heartbreaking variation on his wedding-breakfast byplay with Lola-Lola.

When he sees Mazeppa and Lola-Lola kissing offstage, however, Rath goes wild. Continuing to crow, he runs after his wife and begins to strangle her. The spontaneity of Rath's attack, the depth of his degradation, and the overwhelming sense of his loss make this scene emotionally wrenching. The sound of his mad crowing, the lurching of his huge body, Dietrich's fearful retreat, the screams and scattering of the chorus girls—all of these are conveyed through precise camera setups and sterling sound (including the sound of offstage activity). Rath is finally overpowered and put into the straitjacket that is used as a prop in Mazeppa's act. After Rath has calmed down, Kiepert releases him.

Lola-Lola is now onstage, repeating her opening anthem, "Falling in Love Again" (a song associated with Dietrich from this point on in her career). She sings that she cannot be blamed if men, like moths to a flame, burn their wings when they encounter her. Astride a chair, looking down on her audience impassively, she shows no sign that her husband's emotional turmoil has touched her. Rather, Lola-Lola is narcissistically self-contained, impervious to Rath's desire and to his downfall. He, for his part, has left to steal through the streets back to his old school. Re-entering his classroom, Rath dies with his arms wrapped around the desk that was once his. A traveling shot encompasses the empty room with the tender slowness of a last embrace—the very shot that was used earlier when, on the point of leaving the school for good, Rath had sat, lonely, at his desk—and serves as an obituary that impressively summarizes the tale of the dead man, whose head has sunk onto his desk. A running motif in *The Blue Angel* has been the old church clock that chimes a popular German tune devoted to the praise of loyalty and honesty ("*Üb' immer Treu und Redlichkeit…*")—a tune expressive of Rath's own inherited beliefs. In the concluding passage of the film, after Lola-Lola's own song has faded away, this tune is ironically heard for the last time as the camera shows the dead Rath's face, illuminated by a night watchman's flashlight.

*The Blue Angel* is often referred to as Sternberg's best picture. No doubt it was his most unequivocal critical and commercial success. Happily, he lived to see his *oeuvre* critically resurrected by *auteurist* critics in the 1960s. *The Blue Angel* was one of his few films that did not require reassessment, its position in cinematic history was assured, if not for its dramatic and aesthetic accomplishments, then solely for bringing Marlene Dietrich to stardom. Nevertheless, some may find the movie difficult to

watch. *The Blue Angel*'s depiction of a coldly uncaring milieu and of Rath's masochistic downfall within it results, to be sure, in a film that is not always easy to like but that still must be admired.

Emil Jannings' acting in the picture does take a bit of getting used to, for at first he appears feeble and monochromatically comic. He creates a performance as he goes, however, carefully adding stroke after stroke, and this might strike modern audiences as slow. But if we allow that he is performing to his own metronome, very conscientiously, his performance gradually becomes immense. The scene with the eggs, in which he wears a clown's wig and makeup before an audience that used to know him as a dignitary, glimpsing his wife being embraced by a another man in the wings while the magician forces him to crow like a demented rooster—the utter ravage of a self-debased man—is one of the most shattering moments in all of cinema.

Still, Jannings had hoped to add shadings to his character from Sternberg's direction, but that direction did not materialize as far as the actor was concerned. Instead, he felt he was little more than a character player to an unknown woman named Dietrich. For this reason, throughout the shooting of *The Blue Angel*, Jannings threw tantrums, threatening to walk off the set and doing everything he could to break down the rapport between director and female star. After the film, he was to demand successfully of UFA that he have total control over the material in all of his subsequent films—a decision that destroyed him as a screen star. (Contributing to his professional demise was the fact that Jannings remained in Germany during World War II to become a willing tool for the Nazis, making race-slurring films for Joseph Goebbels' Ministry of Propaganda. During the same period, by contrast, Marlene Dietrich would become an American citizen and an influential anti-Nazi activist, spending much of the war entertaining troops near the front lines and doing radio broadcasts on behalf of the U.S. Office of Strategic Services.)

Dietrich, a bit more plump, and attractively so, than she was later permitted to be in American films, clearly was a star before she actually became one. She has the ease, the bravura, and the wry contempt for the world that were soon to become internationally known. Her feline stroll onstage, her pointed, mocking stares, her casual use of her own sexual allure to beguile the giggling, simpering Jannings—these became elements in a screen persona that Dietrich was to exploit for the rest of her career. What is here also particularly fine is the compassion that she feels for her pathetic professor-husband, her gentleness with him. The Venus in this Venusberg is as tender as she can be with her elderly Tannhäuser. Without question, Sternberg deliberately created a star vehicle for the young Dietrich, pouring all his energy and imagination into the role of Lola-Lola. Borrowing from the drawings of the erotic artist Félicien Rops, he created a figure out of a teenager's sexual fantasy, a vision in black stockings and heavy make-up wearing a heavily tilted top hat. Dietrich's poses and movements onstage were mapped out with choreographic care, her songs crafted for her uninspiring voice by Friedrich Holländer in such a way that each tune required only two or three notes.

Three other members of the cast require comment. Rosa Valetti, who plays Kiepert's wife, was a celebrated Berlin cabaret performer who had been in the first

production of the Brecht-Weill *Threepenny Opera* (1928). Hans Albers, the circus strongman who tempts Dietrich and causes trouble in the last sequences, became a wildly popular theater star. (After his death he was even on a German postage stamp.) These two people, and the almost devilishly perfect casting throughout, create a cabaret universe into which the professor wanders as from another planet. But one cast member requires his own note—and then some: Kurt Gerron (about whom a documentary, *Prisoner of Paradise*, was made in 2002). He plays Kiepert—a heavy man with jowls and a gruff yet humorous voice—with accessible compassion. As the magician of the troupe, Kiepert pulls eggs from the groom's nose at the wedding party of Lola-Lola and Professor Rath—one of which will later be broken, in the climactic cabaret scene, on Jannings' clown-wigged head. The fate under Hitler for some of the others in the cast (like Károly Huszár) was as black as Gerron's, but his story has always seemed a touch more bitter for a reason unrelated to reality: as Kiepert, the manager of the cabaret troupe, he is so completely in command.

Sternberg especially wanted Gerron for *The Blue Angel* because this native Berliner had become a cabaret-theater-film darling of the city. Born in 1897 to a middle-class Jewish family, he had served in World War I, was wounded, and during convalescence began medical studies. After he returned to the front and after the finish of the war, Gerron completed his medical studies. Still, more seductively than medicine, the theater called Gerron—especially the cabaret world where, a sort of quintessential Berliner, wry and satirical, he was quickly taken up by audiences. Not long afterward he was enlisted for cinema and appeared in almost sixty pictures in nine years. He was also called to direct films and become one of the leading comedy directors at the pre-eminent UFA Studios. And he was called by the legitimate theater, as well. He was precisely the sort of theater-canny actor who appealed to Bertolt Brecht: Gerron was in the premiere of *The Threepenny Opera* and was the first person to sing "Mack the Knife."

But in 1933 the Nazi fist descended. Gerron fled to Paris, where he quickly snuggled into work. (*The Blue Angel* itself was banned in Nazi Germany in 1933, as were all the works of Heinrich Mann, among those of a number of other writers and artists.) He played in a German exiles' cabaret there, and he directed three films. He was then invited to direct a film in Austria, after which he moved to Amsterdam. In Amsterdam he directed four movies and helped to run a Jewish cabaret. But the illusion of safety was blown away. The Germans arrived, and this time Gerron, with his wife, could not flee. They were sent to a transit camp in the Netherlands, Westerbork, where there were 16,000 inmates and a well-equipped cabaret theater. Gerron made the most of both facts. Then in February 1944 he was sent to Theresienstadt, a concentration camp in German-occupied Czechoslovakia, where in 1944 inmate Gerron was ordered to direct a propagandistic documentary film called *The Führer Gives a City to the Jews*. (In it, amidst painted buildings, installed flower boxes, improved diet, and provided clothes, children smile, people sit together, eating and talking—all of them, as we know now, obeying unheard orders and under threat of death if they behaved otherwise.) As soon as the Germans were through with Gerron, he and his wife (along with many of the people in this film) were shipped to Auschwitz in Poland, where they were gassed and incinerated on November 15, 1944.

Related to this matter of Nazism and the Jews, it could be argued that *The Blue Angel* avoids, with an assiduity that appears to be exhausting, any allusion to current (as opposed to direct reference to Mann's turn-of-the-century) social conditions in Germany. It suppresses the social environment and tears the performers out of any social context in which their actions might have gained contemporary significance. Placed in such a vacuum, neither Lola-Lola nor Rath has enough air to breathe, which confirms that it is less the reality of their existence that is being demonstrated than that the existence of reality itself is being veiled. Between 1929 and 1930, that reality would have included the following events: the stock-market crash on Wall Street in the United States touches off worldwide economic crisis and the withdrawal of loans to Germany; Wilhelm Frick is appointed Minister of the Interior and of Education in the coalition government of Thuringia, the first Nazi to hold any ministerial-level post in pre-Nazi Germany; Allied troops withdraw from the occupied Rhineland; the Reichstag (Parliament) is dissolved; the Nazis increase their number of seats in the reconstituted Reichstag from 12 to 107 (18% of the vote).

Yet the social environment *does* manage to seep into the filmic environment of *The Blue Angel*, if only indirectly. Before I explain, first, some context. The dadaists had begun as early as 1916 to poke fun at the humanistic ideals and institutionalized conventions of classical art and literature, arguing that the idealism of both German classicism and its opposite, expressionism, amounted to nothing when confronted with the inhumanity of World War I. Trying to forget the recent military past, to reject the Kaiser's authoritarian rule, to call into question all aristocratic notions of culture inherent in the old political system, and to enjoy the present of the early 1920s, many German intellectuals therefore embraced American mass culture, which swept through the major cities, making traditional concepts of art appear isolated, elitist, and even undemocratic. Mass culture encompassed Charlie Chaplin, Josephine Baker, movies, jazz, and boxing, but, above all, it represented modernity and the ideal of living in the present.

As a result, cabaret revues of the kind found in *The Blue Angel*—where they are anachronistically featured to an extent that they could not be in *Professor Unrath*, given that Mann's novel was published twenty-five years earlier—had become the most popular form of live entertainment in Berlin. Consisting of a large variety of quick-paced numbers (songs, theatrical skits, recitations, comedy, dances), they had a structural affinity to the fragmentation of urban experience; their juxtaposition of sights and sounds seemed to express modernity more directly than classical theater ever could. Friedrich Holländer, one of the most prolific and popular songwriters in the Weimar Republic, started his own cabaret, Tingeltangel, a proletarian version of the cabaret immortalized in *The Blue Angel*, in which Marlene Dietrich sings Holländer's own memorable tunes. And from 1921 to 1931, one of the most popular cabarets in Berlin was, not Der Blaue Engel, but Der Blaue Vogel (The Blue Bird). The revue craze lasted as long as prosperity did: from 1924 to 1929. By 1931, in the face of rising unemployment and social unrest, the popularity of revues had dropped noticeably. The Roaring Twenties were over, helped along by Joseph Goebbels himself, who in his periodical *Der Angriff* (*Attack*) showed his contempt for cabaret decadence—particularly of the kind found in the German tradition of political-

satirical cabaret—and vowed to put an early end to what he saw as a dangerous contribution to the disintegration of morals.

Like the cabaret tradition, the character of Rath himself has a social dimension. This archetypal figure—who resembles such German characters as the philistine in *The Street* (1923, dir. Karl Grune), the café owner in *New Year's Eve* (1924, dir. Lupu Pick), and the hotel doorman in *The Last Laugh*—instead of remaining or even becoming an adult, engages in a process of retrogression effected with ostentatious self-pity. This retrogression into immaturity is mirrored in *The Blue Angel* by the conduct of the schoolboys and the cabaret artists, whose sadistic cruelty toward Rath results from the very kind of immaturity that forces their victim himself into submission. It is as if the film were offering a metaphorical warning, for these screen figures anticipate what will happen in real life in Germany only a few years later. The students are born Hitler youths, it could be said, and even the cockcrowing device belongs to a group of similar, if more ingenious, contrivances much used in Nazi concentration-camp "entertainments" to humiliate the inmates and amuse the guards. Only two characters stand apart from these events: the mute, attentive clown and the night watchman at the school who is present at the professor's death (and who recalls the night watchman who befriends the doorman in *The Last Laugh*). These two symbolic figures witness, but do not participate in, Rath's degradation; whatever they may feel, they do not say and they do not interfere or intervene. Their silent resignation (especially the clown's) seems to augur a similar passivity on the part of the German people under totalitarian rule from 1933 to 1945.

So much for the absence from *The Blue Angel* of a social dimension—or an escapist-cum-ethereal one, for that matter. ("Blue angel" refers not only to the slang term for amobarbital, a barbiturate with sedative-hypnotic effects—first synthesized in Germany in 1923—but also to the German romantic symbol, along with the "blue flower," of metaphysical striving for the infinite and unreachable, for absolute emotional as well as artistic fulfillment: both references thematically fitted to Rath's tale.) As for its visual dimension, its visual texture, that is all Sternberg. He already had a legendary reputation as a master of lighting who knew how to illuminate with shadows, a creator of worlds in which he then placed his films. Indeed, it could be said that Sternberg was committed to a style where lighting and atmosphere themselves conveyed the story and where each performer's dramatic encounter with light, if you will, spelled out his or her very thoughts. (Charles Chaplin, incidentally, was so impressed after seeing Sternberg's first film, the naturalistic *Salvation Hunters* [1925], that he engaged Sternberg to direct a non-comic film for Chaplin's then inamorata, Edna Purviance. The film—alternately titled *The Sea Gull* and *A Woman of the Sea*—was completed in 1926, was viewed by Chaplin [who found the picture too sophisticated for general audiences], and then was secreted in a vault and never seen again.)

Sternberg's use of symbolism throughout *The Blue Angel* is as pronounced as Jannings' acting style, and, like it, overwhelms us with its very deliberateness. In the first sequence, in the professor's home, when his songbird—the only creature for which he had affection—is found dead in its cage, the professor is rendered loveless. When he first enters the cabaret, which has a maritime décor, he gets tangled in a net.

At the wedding party for Rath and Lola-Lola, the eggs that Kiepert the magician produces from the professor's nose take on added significance, as symbols of fertility, in the climactic moment, when one of them, instead of cracking open to give birth to a life, is simply cracked to pieces on Rath's pate. Throughout the backstage scenes early in the picture, the clown (later revealed to be another of Lola-Lola's discarded lovers), in an outsized collar, is in the background observing the professor, never speaking; and in the crowing scene, it is the professor, "collared," who wears that collar. The symbols transmute: they grow from signifiers into components of the film's very structure.

Most impressive is Sternberg's gift of concision and elaboration: of gliding and dwelling, gliding and dwelling. He knows when to compress, when to intensify. The scene in which the professor terminates his lifelong teaching career is very brief and thoroughly convincing; the cut from there to the wedding party, and the cut from the professor's objections to the photo cards to his peddling them, serve as Sternberg's license to expand and exult in the major scenes—like the early ones with Rath in Lola-Lola's dressing room, where physical detail seems to make the drama more grave than does the story itself. Indeed, Lola-Lola sings on a miniature Blue Angel stage so overstuffed with props that she herself seems part of the décor, as does Rath when he appears in the company of a wooden caryatid that supports the tiny gallery from which he glares down at his idol. A last contradiction, then: Sternberg's very virtuosity makes the film a triumph over virtuosity.

*The Blue Angel* became, like most of Sternberg's films, an autobiographical excursion. In the material on Rath's teaching methods, for example, Sternberg paid back his own early torment at the hands of his Orthodox Jewish father, who had forced him to learn Hebrew with frequent physical punishment to drive home the lesson. (The aristocratic "von" was added to his surname by a Hollywood producer who thought it would look better on a cinema marquee.) And, by choosing a turn-of-the-century setting, Sternberg placed the story during the period of his own youth, decorating it with images of adolescent eroticism: on the walls of the Blue Angel Cabaret, therefore, he plastered scores of apposite posters and sketches, in addition to hanging the café with cardboard cutouts, streamers, dangling angels, fishing nets, veils, and stuffed birds in an impressive re-creation of the sleazy atmosphere of cabaret life that owed a great deal to the *Kammerspiel* ("chamber film") tradition.

But, apart from his work with Dietrich, Sternberg's films rarely had wide commercial appeal and, after his working relationship with her and Paramount ended in 1935, he found the major studios unresponsive to his ideas. His subsequent Hollywood pictures—with the exception of *The Shanghai Gesture* for United Artists—were infrequent and rather routine. Nonetheless, even before *The Blue Angel* was finished, its own success was obvious. (So much so that it was remade in 1959 by Edward Dmytryk for Twentieth Century-Fox, with May Britt and Curd Jürgens in the leading roles, though this misguided venture only served to increase the original's mystique.) Sternberg had shown tests of Dietrich to Paramount head B. P. Schulberg when the latter visited Berlin, and the studio immediately signed her to a contract. The premiere of the film, on March 31, 1930, was a sensation; that night, Dietrich and Sternberg sailed for America, to be met at the dock in New York City by Sternberg's

wife and a process server with writs against Dietrich for libel and "alienation of affection." (Though Sternberg and his wife were divorced shortly thereafter, he and Dietrich themselves never married.) Neither director nor star was concerned. Dietrich had found the vehicle by which she could achieve global stardom. Sternberg—himself a volatile man of mystery and contradiction, stubbornness and secretiveness, pride and even arrogance—had found the subject on which he could now focus his prodigious talent. The rest, to alter the phrase only slightly, is film history.

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*Morgenrot* (1933), directed by Vernon Sewell & Gustav Ucicky

# Marcel Carné's *Daybreak*



## INTRODUCTION

The predominant filmic style of the period 1934–40 in France has been characterized as "poetic realism" (a term first used in 1929 in a review of Marcel Aymé's populist novel *La Rue sans nom* [*Street Without a Name*, filmed in 1934 by Pierre Cheval])—a blend of lyricism and realism that derives from the influence of literary naturalism and Émile Zola, certain traditions associated with Ferdinand Zecca, Louis Feuillade, and Louis Delluc, certain lessons learned from René Clair and Jean Vigo. Poetic realism in the cinema emphasizes character, situation, mood, and texture over action and plot. It is evocative, let us say, rather than declarative. It has more of a concern for the thingness of this world than for the deeds done in it, which conventional realism tends to emphasize. Poetic realism also has a feeling for the world, and for the feelings of those in it, more than an idea about the world and the way its inhabitants behave in it.

The year 1934 marked the arrival of *Le Grand jeu* (*The Big Game*, dir. Jacques Feyder); 1935 saw *Pension des Mimosas* (*Mimosa Hotel*, Feyder), *Toni* (dir. Jean Renoir), and *La Bandera* (*Escape from Yesterday*, dir. Julien Duvivier); 1936 was the year of *Le Crime de M. Lange* (*The Crime of Monsieur Lange*, Renoir), *La Belle équipe* (*They Were Five*, Duvivier), and *Jenny* (dir. Marcel Carné). In 1937, we had *Une Partie de campagne* (*A Day in the Country*, Renoir) and *La Grande illusion* (*Grand Illusion*, Renoir), *Pépé le Moko* (Duvivier), *Carnet de bal* (*Dance Card,* Duvivier), and *Drôle de drama* (*Bizarre Bizarre*, Carné). In 1938, there were *La Bête humaine* (*The Human Beast*, Renoir) and *Quai des Brumes* (*Port of Shadows*, Carné); finally, in 1939, came *La Règle du jeu* (*The Rules of the Game*, Renoir) and *Le Jour se lève* (*Daybreak,* Carné). All of these films, despite a definite diversity, undoubtedly have something in common. The kinship between their written scripts and their visual styles is blatant: again, it is what has sometimes been dubbed the "poetic realism" of French pre-war cinema.

Poetic realism seems to have had two phases: one born of optimism created by the leftist Popular Front Movement of 1935–37, the other a product of the despair created by the movement's failure and the realization that Fascism (in the form of Hitler and Mussolini) was inevitably on the horizon. The same directors and screenwriters contributed to both phases: Jacques Feyder, Jean Renoir, Charles Spaak, Jacques Prévert, Julien Duvivier, Henri Jeanson, and Marcel Carné. The greatest exponent of the darker aspect of poetic realism was the young Carné. He and his superb collaborator, the surrealist poet Prévert, produced a series of films in the late thirties that incarnate the romantic pessimism of the French cinema in the latter part of its great creative decade: *Port of Shadows*, *Hôtel du Nord* (1938), and *Daybreak*.

Coming at the very end of a decade in which the French cinema reigned intellectually supreme, *Daybreak* was the culminating achievement of the poetically realistic school. Nearly seventy years on, the realism looks uncommonly like romanticism, but there can be little doubt about the poetry. The film is suffused with a bittersweet fatalism, a soft, drifting melancholy that invests the drab settings of factory and tenement with its own sad romance. The characters, hero and villain alike, seem to move in a dream, progressing with stoic resignation towards their inescapable destiny. The parallel with prewar France, awaiting defeat by the Nazis with mesmerized passivity, has often been drawn, and is indeed hard to avoid. By the late 1930s, it seemed evident that the French bourgeoisie, in its subjugation of the working class, had become so decadent that it might even resort to Fascism to defend its power.

Indeed, *Daybreak* was banned under the Vichy regime, accused of having contributed to the debacle of 1940. (Carné responded that the barometer should hardly be blamed for the storm it foretells [Cook, 395].) Widely shown and acclaimed after the war, it was then suppressed again in 1947, this time by the American studio RKO, to make way for Anatole Litvak's crass 1947 re-make, *The Long Night* (with Henry Fonda in the leading role). Subsequent rumors that all prints had been destroyed proved mercifully unfounded. Carné's film resurfaced during the 1950s and is now generally acknowledged, together with *Les Enfants du paradis* (*Children of Paradise*, 1945), as the finest product of his partnership with

Prévert. In 1952, *Daybreak* was even named one of the top ten films ever made by the prestigious *Sight and Sound* poll.

Simultaneously metaphysical and realistic, *Daybreak* exploits the metaphor of a decent man irreversibly trapped by fate more persuasively and powerfully than any other French film of the period. And it does so in large part because of Jean Gabin's performance as the besieged killer, a figure who stands as the epitome of his pre-war persona as doomed proletarian anti-hero, developed through Duvivier's *Escape from Yesterday* and *Pépé le Moko*, Renoir's *The Human Beast*, and Gabin's previous Carné film, *Port of Shadows*. By thus embodying the tragic destiny of the popular hero or common man from picture to picture, Gabin made the dramatic kinship among the films of French pre-war cinema even more explicit. And whether the scenarios were by Prévert, Spaak, or Jeanson, they were all built on the same dramatic structure: that of tragedy translated into contemporary and popular social reality. The masterpiece of such proletarian tragedy remains *Daybreak*, in which Jules Berry's portrayal of Gabin's murder victim is also outstanding—the sadist so compulsively dedicated to destruction that he even brings about his own death in order to destroy others.

I've chosen to begin here with the "form" of *Daybreak* or, more precisely, with its dramatic construction. Such a point of departure need by no means be fatal. Usually one begins the discussion of a film with the reactions of the audience to the story or the characters, then finishes with commentary on the artistic strategies used by the writer-director to visualize or validate the action as he had conceived it. But the point of departure is less important than respect for the fundamental principle of all film analysis: in the cinema, even more than in any other art form, the content can never be separated from the form.

Indeed, the critical analysis of any movie succeeds in proportion to its answers to the following questions: did the audience grasp the relationship between the cinematic techniques used and the thematic intention of the director; and, inversely, could the content itself be defined independently of the techniques employed in this instance to express it? Nothing is more dangerous than a film commentary that treats the content and the form separately. When such commentaries are published, they help to create those naïve pedants in university departments, cinema societies, or film clubs who always want to discuss "technique" and claim to appreciate above all else the qualities of the photography, the camera movements, the unusual angles, etc. We are going to see, precisely in the instance of *Daybreak*, a filmic technique whose excellence is wholly inappreciable independent of the story or the action itself.

If, by way of exception, I begin with the formal element of dramatic construction in *Daybreak*, this is because in this case it is original enough to have held, without interruption, the audience's attention. But the reader will see that my comments here are the result of a lot of effort, beginning with a few formal elements and then delving little by little into the subject by showing that the physical geography of the film in question is strictly determined by an artistic geology, wherein the form and the content are completely identified with each other.

The circularity of the film's construction mirrors its fatalistic mood—what will happen, must happen, for we have already seen it happen. Thus does the focus shift from what happens—action and plot—to how and why it happens—character, situation, mood, and texture. In the opening seconds, in a working-class neighborhood behind a closed door, a factory worker named François shoots down another man, Valentin, with a revolver. We see the mortally wounded man as he exits and reels down a set of tenement stairs. As police arrive and a crowd gathers, the murderer barricades himself inside his one-room apartment. He is soon besieged by the police, who fail in an attempt to shoot their way into the room and then regroup to decide how to apprehend the killer. Through the long night, smoking his last cigarettes, François will pass the time by relating, in flashback, the simple and painful love story that led him to kill, and which, at dawn, will end in his suicide.

Several months earlier, he had begun to date Françoise, a florist's assistant. They bonded over the similarities in their names and the fact that they both were orphans. François fell in love with Françoise and hoped to marry her, but she turned him down in order to have a relationship with the older Valentin, a narcissistic, manipulative animal trainer-cum-artiste (and by extension, through his narcotizing stage spectacles, the bourgeoisie's designated "trainer" or subjugator of the feral working class). Embittered, François then began a relationship with Clara, Valentin's former assistant in his dog show.

Over the next few weeks, Clara herself fell in love with François, but he preferred to have only a casual relationship with her; she knew this was because he had continued to see Françoise, with whom he was still in love. One day, Valentin told François that he was in fact Françoise's father: she had been the product of a youthful dalliance. Later that afternoon, François asked Françoise if Valentin was telling the truth. She denied it, saying that Valentin habitually made up stories. But she also confessed that she was falling in love with François and wanted to be with him.

Valentin soon confronted François in his apartment. The former admitted to having lied about being Françoise's father and brandished a gun with which he had intended to shoot François. Instead, he taunted François with allusions to his sexual encounters with Françoise. Enraged, François picked up the gun and shot Valentin. Alone in his room and out of cigarettes, François realized he had no hope of escape. He did not know that Françoise, delirious with guilt, was now being tended to by Clara.

By way of this carefully structured series of flashbacks, we return full circle to the murder from the beginning, seeing it this time from inside François's room. As dawn breaks, the police prepare a final assault. They decide first to throw tear gas into François's room in an attempt to subdue him. A final shot is heard from within the room, as, unseen, François commits suicide by shooting himself in the heart; a cloud of tear gas then creeps up over this worker's lifeless body in the early rays of the sun; and, abruptly, the noise of the dead man's alarm clock breaks the fateful silence.

### THE ORIGINALITY OF THE CONSTRUCTION

The flashback process of *Daybreak*, which, even at the time, was no longer so rare in the cinema (it became a popular trend in American films, which frequently still begin with the end), was relatively rare in France during this period, and even later flashbacks were very rarely used as they are in Marcel Carné's film. In a picture like Fritz Lang's *The Woman in the Window* (1944), the action of the past is simply framed by the dénouement in the present and the return to that dénouement at the conclusion; the action in the past here is not cut up into fragments that are interspersed with scenes in the present, as in *Daybreak*. In Billy Wilder's *Double Indemnity* (1944), we get a story from the immediate past that is dictated into a Dictaphone, and if we come back to the present at all, it is less for a return to the present itself than to hear testimony. In Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane* (1941), for its part, the past is shown in flashback through the memories of several different characters in the present.

The structure of *Daybreak*, by comparison, is thus relatively exceptional. In fact, what we have in Carné's film is perfect balance in the narrative, which is divided into three groups of memories that are framed by four important fragments of action in the present. What problem did the filmmaker desire to resolve with such a remarkable script, and to what extent did he succeed?

In literature—the novel, for example—it is easy to describe an action that takes place in the past. Verb tenses are made for that. One can write, *"Last Sunday François had gone to see Clara in the furnished room of a small hotel across the street from where he lives."* The past perfect "had gone" is sufficient here to indicate the past. In film, by contrast, the images projected on the screen are necessarily identical whether the event depicted takes place in the present or the past—which is to say, I don't have the means to photograph a table eight days ago. It is the distinctive feature of photography, and more so of cinematography, to provide us with "current" documents. It was necessary, nonetheless, that Carné succeed in getting us to accept that the action occurring in his one-room apartment was contemporary with us, in the present, while the Gabin character's memories were taking place in the past.

Quite frequently in films, in order to pass from one scene to another, which is often quite distant in time or in space, the process used is called a dissolve: that is to say, the last image of the finishing scene disappears little by little to allow, through superimposition, the first image in the following scene to appear. The dissolve is in some ways a punctuation mark—one could almost say a typographical notation—comparable to the opening of a new paragraph, or the bottom of a page left blank to signal the conclusion of a chapter. But the dissolve is used to another end in *Daybreak*.

In this film we can see two different devices used to pass from one scene to another. In the sequences in the present the shot-changes are made very quickly through the use of wipes, which have a kind of sweeping or sliding effect. A wipe is the substitution of one image for another as the replacement image sweeps or pushes the original one off the screen. Carné wanted to register, by means of the wipe, the difference in space or time between fragments of action occurring in the present. Each

scene in the present is then separated from the past action, evoked in the Gabin character's mind, by a dissolve of exceptional length.

What does such a dissolve correspond to?

1  There is a physiological correspondence to the dream-state. The eye fixes itself, the pupil widens, and the image of objects reflected on the retina becomes blurry. The crystalline lens of the eye then ceases to accommodate the force of the eye's own voluntary attention.

2  The dissolve contains a superimposition. Now, the superimposition is generally employed to make us understand that an event or a character is imaginary. The superimposition is therefore used in films about ghosts. Since objects and characters in such an image are in some way transparent, they are interpreted by viewers as half-real, as being as much a part of a dream as of reality. The long dissolves in *Daybreak* are like sensitive symbols of the purely imaginary character of the images that will follow. Throughout each such transition we visibly feel some sort of shift in reality. We pass from the hard and concrete present to a different reality—different because it is only retrieved through memory.

The music itself of this film is important—and much more important when it doesn't appear, even in moments of transition between the past and the present. When you do hear it, the music is obsessive and has a hammered-out quality. The tones of the chosen instruments are themselves strange. We can indicate two principal themes, one sentimental, that of the oboe primarily, the other dramatic and oppressive, that of the basses and the percussion instruments. These two themes are sometimes mixed and sometimes separated, but always very subtly. The oboe theme itself is a sharp one, very melodic, whereas the tympani theme, by contrast, is heavy and exclusively rhythmic. Now, each time that we pass from a scene in the past to one in the present or vice versa, there is a change in the music, or simply in the *apparition* of a musical element—a change that corresponds psychologically to a kind of inversion of values. There are even passages where the music seems to have been turned inside out. Thanks to the music, there is a sonorous ambience to the film that aurally gives the sense of a reversal in the nature of things.

If Carné had only had the dissolve at his disposition, the temporal changes in the action would be much more difficult to accomplish. It is in large part thanks to the music of Maurice Jaubert in *Daybreak* that the viewer is psychologically prepared for the sort of dramatic capsizing that corresponds to the evocation of memories. One only has to compare the facility with which these transitions are made to the awkwardness of the return to the present in Claude Autant-Lara's *Le Diable au corps* (*Devil in the Flesh*, 1947), for example.

Jaubert was perhaps the most important film composer of his time. He wrote the music for every film by Carné up to 1940, the date of Jaubert's death. About film music he averred that it did not need to double the action, to paraphrase it, as did the

innumerable nuptial marches that accompany wedding scenes, or the sentimental violins that underscore trysts between couples in love. Such music must, on the contrary, play its own dramatic role, coming in only where it adds to the psychology of the characters or the character of the action. Recall the admirable leitmotif of Carné's *Port of Shadows*, based on the theme of the fateful sailors' song "Corsair/The Great Runner," when Gabin walks through the streets of Le Havre. It is the music, and almost exclusively so, that gives dramatic meaning to this long sequence where we see nothing but the Gabin character anxiously walking about the city.

If one could conduct the experiment of showing *Port of Shadows* or *Daybreak* solely with the dialogue and without music, one would notice that each film is thereby seemingly emptied of part of its meaning, that the psychology of the characters is impoverished, the action itself is less clear in any event. The music in these films in no way constitutes a mere accompaniment: it is incorporated into the action and even constitutes an action in its own right. This is to make the viewer feel clearly the weight of the past—and that the present, when we come back to it, will not escape the grip of the past.

When the action that we see on screen in *Daybreak* is from the past, there is in fact no music (except during the love scene in the greenhouse, and we shall see why), but when we return to the Gabin figure in the present in his room, the music re-enters the film and remains there as long as we are in the present; and quickly, thanks to the repetition of this process, but foremost thanks to the quality of the music, we identify its score with the imagination of François. The music inhabits us, if you will, even as the protagonist's memory inhabits him.

One scene in particular is quite representative of this point: near the end of the film, the obsessed Gabin stops in front of the mirror, takes a chair and throws it. We hear the crash of broken glass, and then the music stops, as if this act of anger had liberated the hero from his obsession, as if the mirror itself were Gabin's very memory—except that it is only the symbol of that memory. After a few moments of silence, the muffled and haunting tympani theme, little by little, regains possession of the dramatic space, then the oboe theme insinuates itself irresistibly into this sonorous mass and in its own way asserts itself as the protagonist's memory of the young floral-shop worker Françoise.

At the end of *Daybreak*, when Françoise, injured in the crowd, is carried to Clara's room, no music accompanies this scene. But when we learn that the police are going to use tear gas, and the camera takes us onto the roof where a gas-squad specialist is crawling toward François's attic room, music accompanies the action because, although Gabin is not visible, the action is once again centered around him. It is the music, on the roof, that makes Gabin's presence palpable. It radiates from his room like a dramatic aura passing beyond the physical framework of the set, and thus makes the policeman's approach all the more moving. But when we hear the sound of François's revolver firing a second before the officer throws the gas-bomb in, the music stops suddenly. The following shot shows us the diffuse and, in effect, anti-climactic explosion of the canister near Gabin's body. A slight backwards tracking shot uncovers the décor of half of the room where the tear gas is spreading—a scene that will accentuate the first rays of the breaking day, the ringing of the alarm clock,

and once again the outburst of music, which is intense this time and almost glorious during what has become nothing short of a grand finale. Undoubtedly a dramatic counterpoint but also an indication that the "soul" of the hero has finally been freed, this kind of double sonority emanating from him, from his room, spends itself in the serenity of his demise.

Naturally there is no music playing in the present when a violent action, such as a hail of gunfire from police revolvers, distracts François from his memories. In other words, when there *is* music to be heard, one can say that the drama takes place between the Gabin character and the music. To do away with the music in these instances would in no way be to remove an "accompaniment," as clever and even intelligent as that might be; it would be to do away, cleanly and neatly, with one of the drama's protagonists: Gabin's double, as it were. When Gabin smashes the mirror, we literally have the feeling that he has just killed the music, and a sort of dread overcomes us as we are confronted with the absurd brutality and extreme derisoriness of this action.

When I say that there is no music in the past, I exclude, obviously, real music in the film, like that of the café concert. There is only one exception: the love scene in the greenhouse, where we find, precisely in its pure state, the oboe theme. But this scene is an exception because it is privileged, situated, as it is, in some way outside time. It was necessary to show the difference between the nature of this scene and that of other people's realities, and the music helped to do that. (The set was conceived with the same goal in mind, as I shall discuss.) In sum, Carné resolved the problem of the different temporal natures of certain parts of the action in *Daybreak* through a visual device—the dissolve of an unusually long duration—and an aural one—the musical accompaniment composed by Maurice Jaubert.

Also noteworthy are the modifications in décor and costume between past and present. The wardrobe from the past is no longer visible by the door in the present. The François of the present never wears a cap. In the present, the plaza is filled with people. All the while that the present action is taking place, other modifications appear on the set: bullet holes in the wall, broken windows, and the like. These modifications in décor (especially the moving of the wardrobe) provide a reference point in the mind of the viewer and aid him, if the need arises, to locate the scene in time. But this process is not in any way artificial. None of these modifications has the primary goal of helping us "place" the scene; each one has a strict dramatic justification. (See, later in this essay, my discussion of the dramatic significance of the shattered glass and above all of the displacement of the wardrobe.)

Yet, after resolving these problems of dramatic or temporal mechanics, the filmmakers still had to satisfy other structural requirements connected with the sequences in the past *vis-à-vis* the scenes in the present. In effect, as we have seen, the action of the film unravels simultaneously on two levels. While François is recalling his memories, the action in the present develops: the attack on his door by the police sergeants; the captain's arrival, then that of the mobile unit; the arrival of Françoise and Clara, followed by the scene between these two women. François himself is affected by his memories, and his psychological state alters as a result. Each time that we find him in his room in the present, he is doing something or something is

happening to him, and therefore when we return to the past we begin in each instance at a different point in the psychological development of the hero—that is, of the person who is doing the remembering.

Moreover, it was not certain, at the start of François's voluntary confinement in his room, that the drama had to develop in the way it did. It is the evocation of his memories that undermines, little by little, all of his will to resist—up to the final crisis, which will drive him to cry out from his window to the crowd below, "There is no more François, it's over. Don't know any François. I have no more faith, do you understand?"

It was necessary as well, each time the film returned to the present, to create—in addition to the visual and musical transitions—a plausible psychological and dramatic transition that would justify the return. Carné had recourse to various devices to accomplish his aim. I will note only one, particularly successful on account of its psychological realism. It occurs during the second-to-last transition, after François has recounted his break-up with Clara. The latter hands him a brooch similar to the one given to Françoise by Valentin. This scene concludes curiously with a static shot in which we see Clara's face, unmoving, fixing an equivocal look at François. Upon reflection, I must say that the duration of this shot is improbable; the actress Arletty could not have remained in that pose for such a length of time. To what does this improbability owe its existence, then?

As François recalls his difficult memories, the moment arrives when Clara gives the brooch back to him and says: "She has a little one like this, too." This especially terrible moment stays engraved in the Gabin character's mind like an image from a nightmare. Arriving at this point in his memory, he stays there as if frozen in time; and just as the sleeper awakes from a bad dream in a kind of fit, François comes back to reality from the moral pain he is feeling. That is why the image is linked to a long dissolve of Gabin's room, with him sitting on his bed and facing the mirror, on the side of which can be found pinned the brooch. We find it completely natural here that François, whose gaze notices at that particular moment the object of his pain, gets up, tears off the brooch, and viciously throws it out the window. The transition is thus psychologically justified by the lengthy image of Arletty and the linking to the present action that follows, where we see the image of the brooch attached to the mirror in Gabin's room.

I want to touch now on Carné's other great recourse to tie together past and present in *Daybreak*: namely, the décor.

## THE ROLE OF THE DÉCOR

In effect, François, locked up in his room, is surrounded by most of the objects that symbolize his memories of love. Each one of them evokes a happy, painful, or embarrassing moment in his affair with Françoise. Thanks to these objects, we find in Gabin's room—where the present-tense drama unfolds—noteworthy signs of the past as evoked by his memories. Thus the décor here has a role both psychological and dramatic.

The following items will certainly provoke a response from the audience: a bed, a table, a fireplace, a mirror, a rattan armchair, a straight-backed chair, and a wardrobe; the teddy bear (on the fireplace), the brooch, the revolver at the end, the electric lamp covered by a newspaper, and the soccer ball. It is unlikely that there will be any audience-response to the following items, but it's possible, proportionally speaking*:* a washbasin, a nightstand. Other objects that may be noticed in the course of the film's action: the pedal-and-gear mechanism of the bicycle, the alarm clock, the tablecloth, the bedspread, and the wallpaper; a new tie, an ashtray, a pack of cigarettes, two empty boxes of matches, a drawing of François on the wall, and sports photographs on either side of the mirror. The following particular objects are the only ones in the entire room that have no dramatic function at any time, and therefore may not elicit any notice from the audience: a marble-topped chest of drawers situated between the fireplace and the wardrobe; on top of this chest of drawers, an aluminum basket that one fixes on the handlebars of a bike, as well as a lunchbox; on the floor, bicycle tires.

## THE DÉCOR AND THE ACTION

Viewers notice the alarm clock because it rings at the end of the film; the revolver because, in a sense, it is the wellspring of the action; the teddy bear because it is a souvenir from an important moment in the past; the necktie because Gabin carefully picks it up after removing its tag, and because, since he has just killed Valentin, this could seem like an act of mockery on his part. Similarly, we notice that François is careful to make his cigarette ashes, which would otherwise soil the tablecloth, fall into the ashtray. So much cleanliness and an almost manic passion for order, each of which reveals a tidy side that smacks a bit of the bachelor, strike the audience as moral and psychological traits of astounding lifelikeness, highlighted by their contrast with the dire dramatic situation at hand.

To continue: the bullets that tear the wallpaper draw the audience's attention to its decorative stripes. The mirror that Gabin smashes at the end recalls numerous times throughout the action when his character, François, looks anxiously at his reflection, or when we see him only through his reflection in the mirror. Conversely, the chest of drawers, the aluminum basket, and the bicycle tires are situated in a part of the room where the action, so to speak, never occurs. It is natural, therefore, that the audience may not notice them. Nevertheless, if this part of the room had not been visible, if there had been no bicycle tires and no aluminum basket, the room's décor would have been incomplete; and without the chest of drawers, one certainly would never have detected the presence of the tires and the basket—consciously or unconsciously.

From the above we can lay down the laws of filmic décor. Except, naturally, in films of a marvelous or fantastic nature, the cinematic décor should be realistic and meticulously selected. It also has to be spread out over the whole set so that it confirms the plausibility of the action. Yet the décor must not be confined to a merely decorative function. This is because film, through the magnification of objects, through camera movement, and by means of selective editing, can make the entire world of the frame intervene in the action, whereas the theater more or less has only

the actor and his dialogue as its resources. The cinema, by contrast, is able to treat the décor as an actor of its accord in the dramatic narrative.

The totality of the décor in *Daybreak* is consequently indispensable, and I've attempted here to bring to the fore the role that décor can play. The chest of drawers is what we can call ambient décor, with an exactitude or precision that is necessary to our sense of the film's truth. The alarm clock, the teddy bear, and the wardrobe, by contrast, play a dramatic role in the action in addition to any ambient function they may perform.

## THE REALISM AND SYMBOLISM OF THE DÉCOR

The viewer might have noticed the role played in the film by Gabin's cigarettes: the smoking of each cigarette in his pack marks in some way the passage of time during *Daybreak*. François's obligation, for lack of matches, to light his cigarettes one off the other compels him to be vigilantly attentive to the burning tobacco. When, by accident, he forgets to keep his cigarette lit, we experience a strange pain, as if this bit of negligence on his part marked a decisive moment in the tragedy that is taking shape at the same time. It seems that François was condemned to lament the very moment his pack of cigarettes was all used up. This alone—the last little pleasure of smoking—allowed him to go on living. Still, he was unable to extend his luck, or his pleasure, and the inattentiveness that had permitted his cigarette to extinguish itself was finally nothing but a simultaneous renunciation of struggle: a subconsciously deliberate and revealing mistake by François.

To attend now to other parts of the film's décor, the stairway of the residential hotel is a geometric space in the life of the building, a sort of artery through which the inhabitants manifest themselves and from which, at the sight of François, all life flees save the policemen at the bottom, with their hands on the banister. Moreover, the dramatic symbolism of a decorative element like the cigarette, whose meaning is clearly perceived by the viewer, is without doubt subtler in the case of the wardrobe. This famous Norman wardrobe that Gabin pushes against the door and which gives rise to a savory bit of dialogue on the stairs between the police chief and the concierge—in it we naturally see nothing but one detail of an intrigue that captivates us mostly through its realism. Indeed, we can well enough imagine its mention in a miscellaneous news item about this murder-suicide.

In reality, however, the implicit symbolism of this wardrobe is as necessary and precise as that of a Freudian symbol. It is not the chest of drawers, the table, or the bed that François puts in front of the door; it had to be this heavy Norman wardrobe, which he pushes like an enormous slab enclosing a tomb. The body language with which Gabin moves the wardrobe, as well as the very form of this piece of furniture, makes clear that he is not merely barricading himself inside his room: he walls himself in. Even if the material result is the same and we do not consciously see any difference between the two actions, the dramatic tonality of one over the other is altogether different.

More slippery still, and almost impossible to define, is the role of another element in the décor: the glass. There is a lot of glass in the film: the mirror and the panes of

the window in François's room, most prominently. The love scene takes place in a glass-enclosed greenhouse, a synthetic, artificial place where the flowers growing are of a different species from the lilacs one gathers in spring. Then there are the frosted panes enshrouding the cloakroom during the scene of the café-concert and the mirror behind the bar there; the mirrors and windows in the scene between Valentin and François at the bistro; and even the dark glasses belonging to the overly symbolic character of the blind man. Furthermore, when François is going to Françoise's place, instead of following him through the door, the camera glides to the window and observes him for a moment through the pane of glass.

Although it is impossible to claim that, at any one moment in *Daybreak*, glass is a symbol extending beyond its intrigue-related, realistic justification, it seems that the set designer could not arbitrarily have found so many opportunities to show glass to us. Without question, glass is a reflective, transparent material that is at once "truthful," since it lets us see through it; "deceptive," since it nonetheless serves in part to separate us from what we want to see; and "dramatic," because if you ignore it you will break it and hence be responsible for your own misfortune. In this case, glass seems, by its very presence, to condense or constrict François's entire drama. At the very least a sort of agreement, a complicity, exists between glass and this man's drama, as if he could find something like an echo of his own fate in the glass environment that surrounds him.

We see, then, how Carné's realism, at the same time as it stays meticulously faithful to the verisimilitude of the décor, knows how to poetically transpose it: not by modifying it through a formal or pictorial transposition, as German expressionism did, but by extricating its immanent poetry, by compelling it to reveal the secret pact this décor has made with the drama. It is in this sense that one can talk about Carné's "poetic realism," which distinguishes him perceptibly from the style of a Jean Grémillon, for example (whose realism relies less on the effects of décor), but above all from the much more objective realism of a René Clément or a Georges Rouquier. In thus stripping German expressionism almost completely of its recourse to visible transpositions in the décor, Carné simultaneously knew how to integrally interiorize its poetic teachings by using the lighting and the set symbolically—what the Fritz Lang of *M* (1931) had already known how to do yet without ever managing to do without it. The perfection of *Daybreak* is that the symbolic never precedes the realistic during the film, yet somehow still manages to top it in the end.

Notice, as well, the film's suburban plaza, the exactitude of its décor with its central building erected against the sky. It seems that this particular corner of a leprous neighborhood had to be ugly; in reality, one paradoxically becomes aware of the poetry that emanates from this place. The décor here might have appeared real to most of the audience but it is artificial, constructed entirely in a studio. We touch at this point on an important problem connected with filmic décor. I have said that, except in movies of a marvelous or fantastic nature, such décor has to be realistic and exhibit a meticulous verisimilitude. Nonetheless, if one were directly to film a real suburban plaza comparable to the one in *Daybreak*, one would see that it would seem *less* real, that it would incorporate less drama, and that it wouldn't give off the sort of bitter poetry that inheres in Alexandre Trauner's décor.

This is because, to be believable, the décor should not be under-conceived in relation to the narrative. In real surroundings, the décor would have been so, because it would have been impossible to choose the exact angles for the viewpoints needed or to project to the precise location the luminous beam of an arc lamp. These technical reasons alone would suffice to justify a set reconstruction, but there are more. In designing the small suburban plaza, Trauner composed it as a painter does his canvas. Completely submitting himself to the requirements of cinematic reality, he knew how to give the plaza the lightly poetic interpretation that makes it not a reproduction, but a work of art submissive to the artistic economy of the film as a whole.

It is worrying that Carné came to grant the décor too much importance in the overall scheme of his work. Already in *Les Visiteurs du soir* (*The Devil's Envoys*, 1942), it was possible to see the visual significance of Georges Wakhévitch's production design more than its dramatic import. In *Les Portes de la nuit* (*Gates of the Night*, 1946), the development of the décor went so far as to eat into the film like a cancer. Nearly devoid of the dramatic, this décor barely even serves the function of ambience. In *Gates of the Night* Carné asked Trauner for a sort of picture-frame that was at once realistic and poetic—a frame within which the action, itself anemically dramatic, could unfold. Such severe and exacting design restrictions, happily, are not noticeable in *Daybreak*.

## THE DÉCOR: PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL DOCUMENT

The décor plays a dramatic role in this film, as I was saying, but it does so as a function of what would have to be called the psychology of décor. That is, psychologically speaking, the décor serves to unify the characters just as much as the performances of the actors themselves. The décor in *Daybreak* could even be said to constitute a surprising piece of social documentary. For example, when we see Valentin dead on the concierge's bed, he is spread out on top of newspapers. We can imagine why. The concierge did not want this guy, whom she did not know, placed on her bedspread, for any excess of blood could have stained it; so she goes to find some old newspapers in a cabinet and spreads them out beforehand. This simple, documentary-like detail in the décor says more about the psychology of the concierge than could any stretch of dialogue. It is with such details, as much as with the action itself, that we establish character.

It is particularly with regard to the Gabin character that the décor interests me, however. His room, otherwise almost bare, allows us to reconstruct not only the life, but also the tastes and traits, of François. Sports appear to be his only distraction: bicycling and soccer. His bicycle, moreover, is to him a supreme luxury, and for this reason he takes good care of its mechanism (the pedals and gears, the tires). It is a beautiful racing bike made for the road, shiny and well-maintained. François also owns a soccer ball, and the only photos on the wall are of sporting memories. These sports objects are the only "disorder" he allows in his room, because in fact he does not consider them disorderly. On the contrary, he bestows on them sort of privilege or status that he does not grant the other objects in the room.

Now, this room is meticulously arranged. François's variously styled furniture is nonetheless not entirely ugly: the Norman wardrobe itself is very beautiful. It is characteristic of this sort of residence hotel, where the rooms are more like small apartments. (François, it's true, lives in one of the cheapest rooms, an attic apartment.) The furniture and the interior decoration do not have the anonymity associated with rooms in tourist hotels, where guests rent by the day—like the room Clara occupies, on the other side of the plaza, with its copper bedstead, fluffy divan, and a copy of Jean-François Millet's *Angelus* (1857-59) on the wall. In rooms like these we get the feeling that people never fully unpack their suitcases (which pretty much corresponds to Clara's situation). In François's place, by contrast, renters stay for years, and the bric-à-brac furnishings therefore include some solid components, comfortable old things. There are just as many positive elements to the décor in his room, then, as there are significant deficiencies.

Such a room has served others, as well, but it has always had the time to get used to them. In this little apartment, a poor but authentic human sedimentation seems to have deposited itself over the years. François himself has undoubtedly lived there quite a while already; and he has arranged the place after his own fashion: very simply, but in his uniquely rigorous way. He rules this particular roost with a fastidious tidiness evidenced by the mechanical reflex that drives him to perform, after Valentin's murder, the ritualistic gestures of making his cigarette's ashes fall nowhere but into the ashtray—a gesture he completes even though shots have been fired—and of carefully putting away his tie after having removed its label. (These gestures have a dramatic value at this particular instant, to be sure, but at the same time they define François's overall psychology.) This is all because François is a bachelor. Accustomed to solitude since childhood, he has learned to take care of himself. What he has known of women did not prevent him from learning how to keep house and sew on new buttons.

Moreover, one can suspect in François a hint, if not of misogyny, then at least of distrust of women: he has lived up to now without counting on them. This is due to his social origins (dependence on state welfare) but also to his character. He has never been lucky, he says; he has always needed more tenacity, more will, more structure in his life just to hold out and not sink to the bottom. We therefore feel in François a form of patent stoicism or, rather, conscious austerity. He must not drink, his life is orderly, he almost never goes out, and his little free time is devoted to bicycling and soccer. His artistic sensibility itself is weak if not nonexistent—where would he have gotten it? (The only pictorial element in the room: a sketch of Gabin above the bed, most likely a souvenir from a friend who knew how to draw or from some carnival artist who did it for a hundred francs.) But François possesses a common man's feel for elegance that is not incompatible with his bad taste in things generally. His tie is not pretty but he also did not choose it by accident. His cap goes with his personality; he makes it a sort of point of honor never to take this cap off, even with women (witness the love scene).

François seems almost apolitical; whereas sports and his friendship with fellow cyclists as well as soccer players leave visible traces all over his room, we have no clue as to any political opinion he may hold, nor anything that indicates, for

example, membership in a militant workers' union—toward which his work at the foundry should nevertheless have driven him. On this particular point, we doubtless have to take into account a number of constraints, the chief extra-cinematic one being a producer's concern to remain safe inside the most politically benign, irreproachably neutral territory. The same constraint seems to have been imposed on Jacques Becker's *Antoine et Antoinette* (*Antoine and Antoinette*, 1947). To tell the truth, one can't imagine François's being involved in militant politics at all. Even if he is "unionized," there is an anarchic aspect to this man that must make him as wary of politics as he is of women; the open solidarity of his colleagues at work or his sports associates is certainly more to his liking. One should also take into account here the anarchic individualism of Jacques Prévert himself in the composition of François's character.

We can thus see how character traits join with the actor's own performance to justify certain dramatic situations and to explain individual behavior—indeed, to establish the very grounds of narrative credibility.

## WHO IS GABIN?

Naturally, the Sherlock Holmes species of inquiry—in which we have just indulged so as to reconstitute the life and character of François from a few clues offered by the décor in his room—is not something the viewer himself consciously and happily conducts. Yet it is thanks to the presence of these clues that the viewer more or less has an idea of François's identity: that he lives for himself with a kind of moral and social precision. Nevertheless, it goes without saying that the audience receives a lot of other information about the character played by Jean Gabin. The décor comes above all to confirm, clarify, and retouch the idea of this character as it constitutes itself through the dialogue and action of *Daybreak*. I would like now to elaborate upon the profound nature of this action in its relationship to the protagonist and the actor who embodies him.

It was said that Gabin demanded, before signing a contract to shoot a film, that the script include an angry scene during which he would kill someone. And, indeed, one notices that in the majority of his movies, Gabin incarnates a character carried away by anger to the point of murder: for instance, in Duvivier's *Escape from Yesterday*, Renoir's *The Human Beast*, and Carné's *Port of Shadows* in addition to *Daybreak*; and also in Georges Lacombe's *Martin Roumagnac* (a.k.a. *The Room Upstairs*, 1946) along with Raymond Lamy's *Miroir* (*Mirror*, 1947). This story is probably apocryphal, but it might as well have been true. And such a demand would have been the result, not of capriciousness on the part of a star, but of consciousness of the nature of his character or personality.

In reality Gabin was not an actor who got asked to play the protagonist of a narrative; he was himself, before there was any narrative, a protagonist to whom the screenwriter had to bend his will and imagination. No matter what the script, Gabin would not have known how to have a destiny other than his own. And this destiny in fact included outbursts of anger, acts of murder, and the death of the Gabin character himself by the end.

In *Daybreak*, François fought patiently, day after day and with clenched teeth, against the rotten luck that had been dogging him. Since his birth, marked by a kind of social malediction (known as Public Assistance), he has struggled steadfastly against the mechanized or scientific gods of modern society and has been able to hold out against them: the machines, the factory, industrial chemicals, and even the crowded bus that drops him off in the rain. At age thirty, he could think that he had outlasted these gods' malicious hounding, that his courage—and one could say, in the old-fashioned sense of the word, his virtue—had helped him to elude fate. Then François meets the woman who is going to save him from his solitude and consecrate his victory over life. It always seems that only a woman can save Gabin (Michèle Morgan in *Port of Shadows*, for example), and nearly all his pictures are the story of such a salvation—however illusory it may be.

François meets Françoise the day after their shared saint's day, which may be a sign that she is destined for him. He could very well continue his affair with Clara, but he would not cheat on Françoise for as much, because Clara is cut from the same cloth as he. Françoise is precisely something else, and the success of their love will permit François an "out": through her, he will escape Clara in escaping himself. He continues his relationship with Clara only so long as it takes Françoise to assure him of her love. And, ironically, it is Françoise, in whom Gabin has confided all his hope to go on living, who is now going to set in motion the instruments of destiny.

François's purity, and his need to believe in the purity of Françoise, will come back to haunt him. She, in her way—although we don't know through what kind of naïve duplicity—is going to incarnate the negation of the irreversible hope François has confided in her. The reason is that Françoise's own purity, native and almost virginal, reveals itself to be ambiguous and therefore an accomplice to Valentin's supreme impurity. But the drama consists in the possibility, not that Françoise has cheated on François with Valentin—if this were all, François could easily break off their relationship—but that maybe she did it without ceasing to be pure. How? That is the mystery for which François must die. The closer he comes to possessing Françoise, the more he is shaken in his certitude, like the needle of a compass as it approaches a pole. His simple soul could not be saved by anything except the simplicity of someone else's purity, and in Françoise purity shows itself to have a double meaning—an inconceivable kind of purity that seems an accessory to what, for François, is the very symbol of impurity.

François's error is not to comprehend the metaphysical trap that Françoise's purity has set for him. He could be saved if he renounced salvation through the mirage of purity, if he accepted Clara's saving grace, because Clara is of the same race as he even though she knows how to live with the impure. After François, she will go back to being with an ordinary animal trainer from the circus, not because she didn't really love François but because she has finally decided simply to live. Clara's purity is her wisdom. She was not unworthy of François, but he is not able to see her real purity, always fascinated as he is by the intangible mirage of Françoise's own purity.

What life and society had refused François and that he had nonetheless painfully wrested from them in his solitude—all of a sudden Françoise compromises this for him; and even more so, she compromises the entire capital of hope he had placed in

her. Nevertheless, all is perhaps not lost. Everything could even be saved, since Françoise had promised not to see Valentin, and it seems that she has kept her promise, for Valentin just complained to François about this. Could it be that Françoise finally exists for François, that his patience and love ended by compelling her to *be*? Valentin, to be sure, is going to apply himself to the retrospective destruction of this completely new reality, to plunging it back into question. Yet François resists him; he has a sudden burst of wisdom, the preservationist's instinct for happiness: for the first time he masters his anger, calms himself, lets go of Valentin, and tells him to shut up and leave. Still, the other guy insists. So it is that François proceeds to commit the irreversible act, thereby clumsily unleashing the spirits of destiny. Blinded by anger, he seizes the revolver and fires.

The dialogue here perfectly summarizes the metaphysical substance of the situation:

François (*suddenly very calm and lucid*): —It won't get you anywhere.
Valentin (*backing away towards the door*): —And you?

From this point on the infernal machine will set itself implacably in motion. The case can then be handled by the secular arm of modern destiny: justice, the police, their mobile unit, and the police chief himself, who leads this major operation in person. Nothing is left for François but to wall himself in, in the room that has already become his tomb.

It is necessary to recall here that in the epic just as much as in ancient tragedy, anger is not at all a psychological state but rather a metaphysical one, a kind of sacred possession. The modern viewer also (unconsciously) interprets François's anger as a second state, as it were, for which the hero himself could not be morally responsible. This state may even represent the best in François, the purest element of his being that the evil forces of destiny bait in order to force him into a series of angry gestures, at the conclusion of which there will be nothing left for him except to die.

The tragic situation of Gabin's character appears clearly in the scene where we see François shout from his window to the attentive crowd below, which is silent and almost stunned at first, then little by little comes to life and, as one, entreats him to come down: "You are a good guy, we know you, we'll testify for you." The crowd does indeed know François: they know his innocence. Like the chorus of ancient tragedy, they lament the hero's destiny; and this scene has a majestic beauty about it. Through the crowd's intervention, there are also millions of brotherly spectators who silently cry out their support for François, who they nonetheless know is going to die.

If supplementary evidence were necessary to prove the exceptional nature of François's destiny, it would suffice to remark that Jean Gabin was the only French actor, and almost the only actor in the world (Chaplin excepted), for whom the audience expected the story to end badly. After all, all the romantic, star-gazing women out there would have been terribly disappointed if Gabin had gotten married to Jacqueline Laurent or Michèle Morgan at the end of a film. For this reason, Gabin was right to demand yet again his homicidal outburst from screenwriters, since it constituted the significant moment in an immutable destiny wherein the viewer

recognized, from film to film, the same hero. To be sure, this is a hero scaled to an urban world, a suburban and industrial Thebes where the gods merge with the blind (yet still transcendent) imperatives of modern Western society.

<div align="center">CONCLUSION</div>

In this way, the analysis of the François-Gabin character makes explicit—and clearly defines—the profound nature of *Daybreak*. In spite of its careful structure and stylized (if otherwise realistic) appearance, this film is nothing less than a psychological or even social drama. Like that of tragedy, the veritable fatedness or inexorability of the narrative and its characters is purely metaphysical. The realism of the *mise-en-scène*, of the décor, the characters, the dialogue, and the intrigue itself, is only the pretext for the modern incarnation of an action that we would doubtless not know how to describe outside its contemporary manifestation—but which essentially goes beyond such a manifestation. Nevertheless, this dramatic action is not valid or convincing except in exact proportion to its realism. The art of Marcel Carné and his collaborators is to make reality, whether it be psychological (the characters of Valentin, Françoise, Clara) or material (the décor, including the cigarettes and the wardrobe), fulfill its function as reality before insinuating its symbolic values into the picture. It is thus as if the poetry did not begin to make its presence felt until the precise moment when, paradoxically, the action seemed to identify itself only with the most plausible details of its own surface. Let me be clear: the realism in *Daybreak* has the rigor of poetry. That is, everything is "written" in verse, or at least in prose, that is invisibly poetic.

I have had the opportunity to show, progressing through this essay, how the *mise-en-scène*, the décor, music, dialogue, costumes, and the actors' performances work together in *Daybreak* to create a narrative and its characters without its ever being possible to disassociate technique from script, form from content, or subject from style. This is surely one definition of good cinema.

A final remark: one perspective has, without question, been absent from this analysis, and that is the moral one. I hope the reader will have understood by now that this perspective seems as false to me as the "technical" one, and that it is as absurd to judge the "moral value" of a film apart from its substance as it is to judge a movie's abnormal camera angles without taking into consideration the abnormality of the story they tell. I hope, moreover, to have even convinced the reader, by implication, of the excellence of the moral code of a film like *Daybreak*, which is finally nothing less than a tragedy of purity and solitude, if not of the soul.

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## FILMOGRAPHY: KEY FILMS OF FRENCH POETIC REALISM

*Little Lise* (1930), directed by Jean Grémillon

*Mimosa Hotel* (1934), directed by Jacques Feyder

*The Big Game* (1934), directed by Jacques Feyder

*L'Atalante* (1934), directed by Jean Vigo

*Escape from Yesterday* (1935), directed by Julien Duvivier

*Carnival in Flanders* (1935), directed by Jacques Feyder

*They Were Five* (1936), directed by Julien Duvivier

*The Lower Depths* (1936), directed by Jean Renoir
*Pépé le Moko* (1937), directed by Julien Duvivier
*Grand Illusion* (1937), directed by Jean Renoir
*The Human Beast* (1938), directed by Jean Renoir
*Port of Shadows* (1938), directed by Marcel Carné
*Hôtel du Nord* (1938), directed by Marcel Carné
*The Rules of the Game* (1939), directed by Jean Renoir
*Daybreak* (1939), directed by Marcel Carné
*Stormy Waters* (1941), directed by Jean Grémillon
*Summer Light* (1943), directed by Jean Grémillon
*Children of Paradise* (1945), directed by Marcel Carné

# Ernst Lubitsch's *To Be or Not to Be*



Ernst Lubitsch's *To Be or Not to Be* (1942) is the best film by this otherwise hugely overrated director. It is a satirical comedy about Adolf Hitler at the same time as it *was* a morale-builder for Resistance fighters throughout Europe during World War II. Along with Charles Chaplin's *The Great Dictator* (1940), also a satire on Hitler, *To Be or Not to Be* is an early landmark in the evolution of a modern genre: war as black comedy. Some other examples are Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove, or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964), Richard Lester's *How I Won the War* (1967), Robert Altman's *M\*A\*S\*H* (1970), and Mike Nichols' *Catch-22* (1970). (*M\*A\*S\*H*, of course, later made it in diluted form to television, where it joined that medium's other satire on the Nazis, "Hogan's Heroes.")

The premise of black comedy, as applied in these works to World War II, the Korean War, and nuclear holocaust, is that laughter is the only sane response to the horror of war, that this horror must be combated by humor. (No one has yet treated the Vietnam War directly, as opposed to metaphorically, as a black comedy—at least, not on film, with the possible exception of 2008's *Tropic Thunder*. As for indirect comic treatments of the Vietnam War, we can turn to the above-mentioned *How I Won the War*, *Catch-22*, and *M\*A\*S\*H*. On the surface, these three films are darkly satirical comedies about World War II and the Korean War, respectively, but each one

was released at the height of the Vietnam War and was widely understood at the time to be an oblique comment on the then-current Asian conflict.) The reasoning behind black comedy goes something like this: in a world that can produce a Hitler or the destructive capability of the atomic bomb, nothing is sacred, nothing absolute; all values, beliefs, principles, and truths are open to question. This questioning then logically gets extended to artistic forms, where, in black comedy, the most serious subjects are given, not a serious or tragic treatment, but a satirical, even farcical, one.

In psychological terms, the genre of black comedy can be seen as a schizophrenic reaction, and thus a kind of cry or plea, to an absurd world—a world itself gone crazy. I use the phrase "reasoning behind" in the previous paragraph because, for many people, black comedy requires justification. *To Be or Not to Be*, for one, has been widely criticized, then as now, as an inappropriately farcical treatment of Nazi terror. Some even argue, as we know, that the Holocaust is beyond fictional treatment of any kind, because such depiction, no matter how thematically complex and technically accurate, diminishes the horror simply be enclosing it within the boundaries of a work of art. (I myself have never believed this, and believe that those who do wish simultaneously to apotheosize the victimhood of the Jews—but what about the victims of the Holocaust who were not Jewish?—and to deny the transformative, edifying powers of art.)

What critics of *To Be or Not to Be* have missed are that (1) its use of the first line of Hamlet's famous soliloquy is quite sophisticated (I guess they didn't care about this); and (2) Joseph Tura (played by, surprise, Jack Benny) is not only a comic Hamlet-figure, but also, in his self-absorption, a sly mockery of those similarly self-concerned Western nations that were content to let Hitler go about his bloody business as long as he left them alone. So self-absorbed is Joseph that he neglects his beautiful wife, Maria (Carole Lombard), who takes to flirting (nothing more) with handsome young servicemen to get the attention she needs.

Tura and Maria are the leading actors of the best theater company in Warsaw on the eve of Hitler's invasion of Poland. "To be or not to be" is the line, delivered by Joseph from the stage, on which a flier, Lieutenant Sobinski, leaves the auditorium each night to visit Maria in her dressing room. This line is also Sobinski's love message to Maria from his wartime posting, England—a message delivered by the double agent Alexander Siletsky, who acts as a confidant to the Polish wing of the Royal Air Force in order to infiltrate the Polish Underground. Once Siletsky is discovered to be a spy, Sobinski's message takes on the same meaning for Maria and her fellow performers (all of whom support the Underground movement) that it had (among other meanings) for Hamlet in his quest for revenge against Claudius, the murderer of his father:

> To be or not to be, that is the question:
> Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer ["to be"]
> The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune [Siletsky's treachery; the
> Nazi occupation of Warsaw],
> Or to take arms [not simply "to be"] against a sea of troubles
> And by opposing end them [and risk one's life in the process]. (III.i.64–68)

The acting company decides that Siletsky must be killed before he can divulge to Nazi authorities the information he has on the Polish Underground, and Joseph Tura ever so reluctantly joins in the plot to stop him. He hesitates, not for the same complex reasons as Hamlet, but because he's flat afraid, since he must play both the Nazi officer who lures Alexander Siletsky to his demise and then Siletsky himself. (Thus does the company use its talent for disguise and mimicry to maneuver a group escape from Poland through the daring device of impersonating Hitler himself, as well as his entourage, on an official visit to Warsaw.) Tura also hesitates because he is as concerned to discover the extent of his wife's relationship with Sobinski (who was the one to expose Siletsky in the first place by returning to Warsaw from England, under cover) as he is to defend the Polish Underground.

Tied in with Tura's concern about his wife's supposed affair is his actor's vanity (and insecurity): for he is most upset that Sobinski and Maria have arranged their trysts so that the airman must walk out on Joseph's "To be" soliloquy in order to be alone with his love interest. Joseph becomes a comic Hamlet-figure because he doesn't know what to do about the "usurper," Sobinski: he can't find any hard evidence of adultery (there is none), and Sobinski is a valued member of both the Polish air corps and now the Polish Underground.

Joseph Tura remains both comic and pathetic until the very end, since he never realizes that he himself is largely to blame for his wife's flirtation, and since he is confronted in the last frame (in England, to which the actors have fled, and where Joseph has been granted his wish to play Hamlet in Shakespeare's native land) by yet another serviceman who walks out on his "To be" soliloquy to visit Maria backstage. Thus the bedroom farce that is *To Be or Not to Be* will not be resolved by the war that so jarringly interrupts it; it will merely be deferred to a sequel we can only imagine and for which the last shot sets us up. The Lubitsch comedy is disrupted, for once, by forces beyond its control: "It's war!" Left to follow its own course, *To Be or Not to Be* might have turned into a close variation on Lubitsch's previous picture, the only sporadically successful triangular comedy *That Uncertain Feeling* (1941). Under the circumstances, the comedy goes underground, like the actors, only to pop up at the most inopportune moments, many of them unwittingly engineered by Joseph Tura himself.

Joseph can be seen, moreover, as a symbol of Western complacency and self-interest in the face of Hitler's European onslaught because, all the time that he is helping to destroy Siletsky, he is, in his overwhelming desire to learn more about the extent of Sobinski and Maria's involvement, on the verge of blowing the Polish Underground's cover and aborting its mission. This desire does in fact lead Joseph inadvertently to expose his own true identity and real intentions when he takes advantage of his role impersonating Colonel Ehrhardt to try to find out what Maria has been up to. The spark of inappropriate feeling gives him away to Siletsky, who nearly escapes (before coming as close as the Production Code would allow to calling Tura's wife a whore) while Tura, predictably, does nothing—and then ridiculously thinks he has been hit by bullets fired by one of his fellow actors at Siletsky, killing him. To the very end, Joseph Tura is more concerned, then, with his own safety, success, and marital security than with anything else, topping off his egotism by

agreeing with English newsmen that he was the heroic leader in the plot to kill Siletsky and preserve the Polish Underground.

Siletsky is crucial to the film because he is the only character who is not funny. The other Nazis in the story can be fooled and, as such, are laughable. Sig Ruman's magnificent Colonel Ehrhardt, for example, is a full-blown comical picture of evil—obsequious to superiors and tyrannical to underlings, lecherous and fatuously self-admiring, quick to bully and quicker to plead for mercy—and even his end is played for comedy. Siletsky, by contrast, is a figure of *real* evil and has to be killed outright, with no jokes. Everything that surrounds him is in earnest, giving a particularly sharp edge to the scene in which Maria visits him in his hotel room to intercept his exposure of the Polish Resistance network. The scene is full of echoes of Lubitsch's *Trouble in Paradise* (1932). There, Miriam Hopkins and Herbert Marshall were two con artists, each vainly trying to con the other and finally falling in love. In *To Be or Not to Be,* all the elegance of that earlier seduction scene is reduced to a crude bit of sexual bargaining, with Maria playing for time by keeping Siletsky at bay.

Siletsky's tired imitation of a suave seduction does indeed suggest that he saw *Trouble in Paradise* at some point and picked up a few line readings from Marshall, but just beneath those readings are brutal impatience and barely veiled contempt. The Nazi as would-be *bon vivant* comes out with lines such as the following: "In the final analysis, all we are trying to do is create a happy world…Why don't you stay for dinner? I couldn't think of anything more charming, and before the evening is over, I'm sure you'll say, 'Heil Hitler.'" There is no suggestion, however, that Siletsky has any ideological concerns other than being on the winning side. Where many Hollywood films would emphasize Nazi fanaticism, Lubitsch zeroes in here on a more disturbing image of pragmatic calculation. Siletsky is an intruder in Lubitsch's comic world, the voice of someone who has come to announce that the party is over. A character beyond civility and beyond humor, he shatters the rules of discretion normally operative in a Lubitsch comedy.

It is precisely in this scene between Siletsky and Maria that Lombard's playing reaches a giddy peak of exhilaration. She proves that Maria Tura is a great actress because she's sexiest at just the moment where we know she's totally faking it; surely Siletsky will be captivated, because we certainly are. She brings to an impossible part—a Polish patriot prepared to sell out her country for a serving of oysters and caviar, a famous actress who finds the attentions of an aging Gestapo collaborator irresistible—all the invention and exuberance she can muster, spinning fresh revelations of flirtatious charm on the edge of the abyss to gain a little more time, right up to that final, breathless "Bye!" she whispers to Siletsky as she glides out the door.

It is fascinating to contemplate *To Be or Not to Be* alongside that other great exposition of theatrical egomania, Howard Hawks's *Twentieth Century* (1934), especially given the presence of Carole Lombard in each film, giving two utterly different performances. With Hawks, the atmosphere is one of real madness, of self-absorption so relentless on the part of both Lombard and John Barrymore that it creates a mood of unforgiving savagery. Nothing could be further from that nightmare than the vanity of Lombard and Jack Benny in *To Be or Not to Be,* in which each

indulges in the sort of illusion that makes life bearable and that each in turn tolerates in the other. They are more, not less, human by virtue of their egotism, since neither evinces any desire to hurt—unlike the Don Ameche character in *Heaven Can Wait* (1943), Lubitsch's next film, to whom the devil says at the end, "We don't cater to your sort here."

In my view, then, *To Be or Not to Be* is conceptually and thematically rich, not a one-track satirical assault on Hitler. Long acquaintance with *To Be or Not to Be* only makes more fascinating the skill with which its humorous variations are worked: the titular quotation itself, the joke about Hitler's becoming a piece of cheese, the Shylock speech, the false beards and moustaches, not to mention the countless comic inflections given to "Heil Hitler." That phrase almost becomes the leitmotif of the film; not only does Lubitsch turn it into a comedy line, he turns it into an array of quite distinct comedy lines, having already kicked the film off with Bronski's hilarious entrance as Hitler in the Tura company's never-to-be-performed play *Gestapo*: "Heil myself."

Indeed, *To Be or Not to Be* did something rare in the 1940s, and has done it ever since, by interweaving farce and disaster in such a rigorously structured fashion as to elicit, in the very same scenes, genuine anxiety and acute hilarity. But at every step, it keeps plainly in view—just offscreen, and detectable even in the comic buffoonishness of Ruman's Colonel Ehrhardt—the possibility of real terror, real soul-destroying cruelty, genuine suffering. The fear is palpable, and even though each emerging danger is deflected by the most ingenious comic solution, another danger soon enough takes its place. In *To Be or Not to Be,* Lubitsch thus seems to deliberately challenge the stylistic and emotional equilibrium of his earlier work, as if to see how much stress it can take. He had made a world of elegant illusions, of luxuries and pleasures savored by being transformed into metaphorical wit (the "Lubitsch touch")—a parallel place that, at any time, might well be the place where one would rather be. But there was nothing flimsy or casual about it: the illusion was acknowledged to be an illusion by the characters themselves, and that acknowledgment made it real. Nowhere did this realness become more apparent than in *To Be or Not to Be*, where for once he dared to pit the inhabitants of his world, living on wishful reverie and theatrical sleight of hand, against forces of real destruction.

By way of preparing the audience for what is in store, Lubitsch lays down from the start a pattern of deception and reversal. We see Hitler walking the streets of pre-war Warsaw; a moment later, we are given Jack Benny in the role of a Gestapo officer—something so shockingly unexpected that Benny's own father, unprepared, walked out of the theater in disgust. These first impressions are rapidly dissipated as we are made aware of having been drawn into a play-within-a-play. But the structural game-playing continues in different modes, as theatrical illusion is enlisted in the struggle against the Nazis, whose own grandiose brand of theatricality has a heavy-handed humorlessness about it. The "all-the-world's-a-stage-and-all-the-men-and-women-merely-players" conceit in fact pervades the film and suggests, finally, that the otherwise nondescript little man with the peculiar

moustache owed no small part of his political-cum-military success to his crowning abilities as a humorless performer.

That Nazi humorlessness, of course, will be successfully manipulated by Benny, Lombard, and the rest of their troupe of Polish actors. The genius of *To Be or Not to Be* is that these performers do not work as a buoyant band of movie adventurers in the style of Robin Hood's Merry Men, but as a squabbling assortment of egotists and grumblers who needle one another even in the midst of danger, ham actors ("What you are I wouldn't eat," Felix Bressart's Greenberg tells Lionel Atwill's Rawitch) who cannot resist padding their lines even when carrying out an undercover mission against the Gestapo. From first to last, this is a film about theater, weaving in countless asides on the slippery perils and uneasy joys of impersonation-cum-improvisation, and relishing with infinite affection the many shades of actorly vanity. Nothing is wasted, although much is repeated. In fact, the dramatic rhythm is built through the repetition of elements, the same scenes replayed with different actors, the same lines spoken again in different contexts.

The storyline of *To Be or Not to Be* is attributed to Lubitsch's old acquaintance Melchior Lengyel, one of those Hungarians whose dramaturgical contraptions the director found so indispensable as a point of departure for his own inventions. (Lengyel had previously appeared in the credits of Lubitsch's *Forbidden Paradise* [1924], *Angel* [1937], and *Ninotchka* [1939].) As scriptwriter, Lubitsch enlisted not a previous collaborator such as Samson Raphaelson or Billy Wilder, but the playwright Edwin Justus Mayer, author of the critically admired but commercially disastrous play *Children of Darkness* (1930), a work too literary for a Broadway hit and too dark, with its story of condemned prisoners in eighteenth-century London, for the comedy it was meant to be. *To Be or Not to Be* differs sufficiently from any other Lubitsch film that it seems fair to grant Mayer a decisive role in the shaping of its pointed style.

Almost no line of dialogue here is without a barbed secondary implication; jokes comment knowingly on the jokes that preceded them, adding elements of ironic awareness too discreetly and rapidly for a single viewing to suffice. "I thought you would say that," says Benny's Joseph Tura (impersonating the turncoat Siletsky) to Gestapo commander Colonel Ehrhardt when the colonel comes up with precisely the same remark that Tura improvised when impersonating Colonel Ehrhardt in conversation with the real Siletsky. Earlier, Lombard, as Tura's wife, Maria, rattles off examples of how her husband is always trying to take credit for everything, concluding: "If we should ever have a baby, I'm not sure I'd be the mother." Benny's even funnier comeback—"I'm satisfied to be the father"—subverts Production Code niceties neatly but is often missed because audiences are still laughing at Lombard's impeccably delivered speech.

For all their comedy, *To Be or Not to Be* and films like it are still objected to on account of their core subject matter, and one can only respond that good art is its own reason for being and will always find its audience. The ultimate question in art, of course, is not what you present but how, or *how well*, you present it—not the story itself but the manner of telling it. When people laugh at a screening of *To Be or Not to Be*, therefore, they are not laughing at the horror of Nazism, but at Ernst Lubitsch's reduction of it to size. Lubitsch turns Nazism from the monstrous into the ridiculous,

from something that was undeniably perpetrated by human beings into something carried out by automaton-like objects. For the moment, he triumphs over the Nazi horror, and so do we. That is all art can do: take us out of the world *for the moment* and give us another point of view on our lives, show us another way of looking at ourselves. Point of view in a work of art is thus not meant to *substitute* for the one we hold in life, as the critics of *To Be or Not to Be* would have us believe, but both to give us relief from and perspective on that (real-life) point of view.

Black comedy, to be sure, isn't for everyone, but that doesn't mean it shouldn't be for anyone: some of us like our screen horror successfully offset by humor. Others prefer their horror utterly unmitigated by the guise of fiction, be it humorous or not, and for them there are documentaries like Alain Resnais's *Night and Fog* (1955), an account of the events that transpired at Auschwitz, and Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985), a nine-and-a-half hour documentary on the Nazi extermination of Jews all over Europe. Still others prefer to see the Holocaust treated in serious fictional (if "fictional" is the appropriate term) form, going back as far as Wanda Jakubowska's *The Last Stage* (1948) and Aleksander Ford's *Border Street* (1949), continuing with Andrzej Munk's *The Passenger* (1963), and stretching into the recent past with Andrzej Wajda's *Korczak* (1990), Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1993), István Szabó's *Sunshine* (1999), Roman Polanski's *The Pianist* (2002), and Lajos Koltai's *Fateless* (2005).

By the very nature of its subject, as one might guess, *To Be or Not to Be* caused Ernst Lubitsch considerable trouble, even though it came late in his successful film career, which began in Germany in 1913 and finished in Hollywood in 1947. It must be recalled that Lubitsch was Jewish and would in any case have been under heavy pressure to leave Germany after January 1933 had he not already done so ten years earlier. Hitler himself is said to have had a particular animus against Lubitsch, as a Berlin Jew who triumphed in the German film industry and then went on to further triumphs in Hollywood. Employing footage of Lubitsch taken in Berlin on his last visit to his hometown, just six weeks before Hitler was sworn in as Reich chancellor, the Nazi propaganda film *The Eternal Jew* (1940) went so far as to display the director's face as an archetype of corruption and depravity,

In *To Be or Not to Be*, Lubitsch and his Hungarian-Jewish producer, Alexander Korda of Britain, were thus very conscious of what they were doing. In advocating that Chaplin seek to debunk Hitler through satiric impersonation, Korda had originally inspired him to make *The Great Dictator*; now, as producer of *To Be or Not to Be*, he backed Lubitsch's idea to render the Nazi image ludicrous in a story set in German-occupied Warsaw. But Jack Benny against the Nazis? A farce set in occupied Warsaw? Jokes about concentration camps? The Gestapo itself foiled by an elegant web of implausibilities? It is not surprising that a good many critics and viewers at the time found the movie tasteless and inappropriate. The ever-obtuse Bosley Crowther of the *New York Times* intoned:

> A shocking confusion of realism and romance. Frankly, this corner is unable even remotely to comprehend the humor in such a juxtaposition of fancy and fact. Where is the point of contact between an utterly artificial plot and the

anguish of a nation which is one of the great tragedies of our time? You might almost think Mr. Lubitsch had the attitude of "anything for a laugh." (March 7, 1942)

Since by the time of the film's release the dire sufferings of the Polish people under Occupation were well known, it was widely felt that to make such a situation the subject of a farcical comedy (however sophisticated in concept) showed a grave lack of taste. (The film's reception was also inevitably darkened by the death of Carole Lombard in a plane crash—and on a war-bond mission—on January 16, 1942.) When the inevitable critical attack came, Lubitsch replied in the *New York Times* of March 29, 1942, defending himself against the accusation that he lacked taste:

> Fortunately, I am not the only one accused of that crime. My co-defendant is the American motion-picture audience…Why do they laugh during *To Be or Not to Be*, and at times very heartily? Aren't they aware of what happened in Poland? Did I try to make them look at the Polish background through rose-colored glasses? Nothing of the kind. I went out of my way to remind them [in the film's realistic early scenes] of the destruction of the Nazi conquest, of the terror regime of the Gestapo…Do I minimize their danger because I refrained from the most obvious methods in their characterization? Are whipping and flogging the only way of expressing terrorism? No, the American audience doesn't laugh at those Nazis because they underestimate their menace, but they are happy to see this new order and its ideology being ridiculed.

The marvelous Ernst Lubitsch, that past master of sophisticated comedy—and of comic sophistication—did make one mistake in this film, however: in the casting. Joseph Tura, the leading actor of the Warsaw troupe, was played, after all, by Jack Benny. Millions of Americans at the time adored Benny, a vaudeville and radio (and later television) comic, for his drawl, his pauses, his quizzical inflections, his petty angers, but these were, in *To Be or Not to Be*, the sole techniques of the character that he was playing: a great theater star, a tragedian who offstage was a sort of Molnár character. But owing to Benny's popularity, Lubitsch put this limited vaudevillian in the role anyway.

Benny was simply unbelievable as a great actor and was clumsy as an offstage salon gentleman. And there in Hollywood all the while was Fredric March, handsome, dazzlingly gifted, who could have and should have played Hamlet, and who was already celebrated for comic acting, not for a skimpy repertoire of tricks. March was ignored; and a film that might have been a comic masterpiece became…a film that might have been a comic masterpiece. Still, if Lubitsch's greatest talent was his ability to make us laugh at the most serious events and anxieties, to use comedy to make us more aware of ourselves and the dangerous world around us—*not* his ability to deploy the "Lubitsch touch" though sparkling dialogue as well as intriguing plots, witty characters, and an air of whimsy in such romantic comedies as *Trouble in Paradise* and *Heaven Can Wait*—then *To Be or Not to Be* should be considered the

consummate work of his artistic career. To paraphrase a line by Greenberg early in the film, its laughs are not to be sneezed at.

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## FILMOGRAPHY: KEY BLACK COMEDIES ABOUT WAR

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*The Good Soldier Schweik* (1960), directed by Axel von Ambesser

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*King of Hearts* (1966), directed by Philippe de Broca

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*Closely Watched Trains* (1966), directed by Jiří Menzel

*The Russians Are Coming the Russians Are Coming* (1966), directed by Norman Jewison

*How I Won the War* (1967), directed by Richard Lester

*Oh! What a Lovely War* (1969), directed by Richard Attenborough

*M\*A\*S\*H* (1970), directed by Robert Altman

*Catch-22* (1970), directed by Mike Nichols

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*The Men Who Stare at Goats* (2009), directed by Grant Heslov

# Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon*



The genius of Akira Kurosawa was manifold all through his long career. Prodigally, prodigiously, he moved with ease and mastery and style from the most mysteriously interior to the most spectacular. *Ikiru* (1952) is about a dusty civil servant in postwar Japan doomed by cancer; *Seven Samurai* (1954)—one of the great artworks of the twentieth century—is a historical epic about honor as a predestined anachronism. Contrasts from his filmography could be multiplied: *Stray Dog* (1949) is a crime-detection story; Kurosawa's version of Dostoyevsky's *Idiot* (1951) is so atypical in style that it's hard to believe the film was made between *Ikiru* and *Rashomon* (1950)—itself a Pirandellian study, with somber overtones, on the relativity of truth or the impossibility of absolutes; and *Record of a Living Being* (1955) is about an old Japanese man who wants to migrate with his large family to Brazil to escape the next atomic war.

Indeed, Kurosawa could be called a man of all genres, all periods, and all places, bridging in his work the traditional and the modern, the old and the new, the cultures of the East and the West. His period dramas, for example, each have a contemporary significance, and, like his modern films, they are typified by a strong compassion for

their characters, a deep but unsentimental, almost brusque humanism that mitigates the violence that surrounds them, and an abiding concern for the ambiguities of human existence. Perhaps most startling of Kurosawa's achievements in a Japanese context, however, was his innate grasp of a storytelling technique that is not culture-bound, as well as his flair for adapting Western classical literature to the screen. No other Japanese director would have dared to set *The Idiot*, Gorky's *Lower Depths* (1957), or Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (*Throne of Blood*, 1957) and *King Lear* (*Ran*, 1985) in Japan. (The intercultural influence has been reciprocated: *Rashomon* directly inspired the American remake titled *The Outrage* [1964], which changed the setting to the Old West; *Seven Samurai* was openly imitated in the Hollywood movie called *The Magnificent Seven* [1960; 2016], which also changed the location to the Old West; the Italian "spaghetti Western" *A Fistful of Dollars* [1967] was pirated from *Yojimbo* [1961]; and *Star Wars* [1977] was derived from *The Hidden Fortress* [1958].)

But Kurosawa also adapted works from the Japanese Kabuki theater (*Men Who Tread on the Tiger's Tail*, 1945) and used Noh staging techniques, as well as music, in both *Throne of Blood* and *Kagemusha* (1980). Indeed, he succeeded in adapting not only musical instrumentation from Noh theater but also Japanese popular songs, in addition to Western boleros and Beethoven. (Kurosawa remarked in 1980, in a *Film Comment* interview [Yakir, 57], that his generation and the ones to follow grew up on music that was more Western in quality than Japanese, with the paradoxical result that their own native music can sound artificially exotic to contemporary Japanese audiences.) Like his counterparts and most admired models, Jean Renoir, John Ford, and Kenji Mizoguchi, he thus took his filmic inspirations from the full store of world cinema, literature, and music.

As for the suggestion, as a result, that Kurosawa was too "Western" to be a good Japanese director, he himself always insisted on his simultaneous Japanese and internationalist outlook. As he declared in the *Film Comment* interview cited above, "I am a man who likes Sotatsu, Gyokudo, and Tessai in the same way as Van Gogh, Toulouse-Lautrec, and Rouault. I collect old Japanese lacquerware as well as antique French and Dutch glassware. In short, the Western and the Japanese could actually be said to live side by side in my mind, without the least sense of conflict" (56). To be sure, along with other Japanese directors and with Satyajit Ray (whose *Pather Panchali* introduced Indian cinema to the West in 1955), Kurosawa's films share a liability to remoteness in Western eyes—in his case, not in style or subject matter but in the performative details of gesture and reaction. Yet his work is less affected by cultural distance than that of most Asian directors.

Hence it was not by accident that the first Japanese director to become known in the West was Akira Kurosawa, when *Rashomon* won the top prize at the Venice Film Festival in 1951, together with a Special Oscar as best foreign-language picture of the same year. Up to then, although the Japanese film industry had been enormously active, with high annual production figures, it might as well have been situated on the moon as far as the West was concerned. World War II was not a prime reason for the gap; relatively few Japanese films had been seen in Europe and America before 1939. (When *Rashomon* opened in New York, it was the first Japanese film to be shown

there since 1937.) The barrier to import was financial, not political—the same barrier that obstructs the import of foreign literature.

The cultural shock that followed from the Venice Festival showing of *Rashomon* was a smaller mirror image of the shock felt in Japan a century earlier when Commodore Perry dropped in for a visit. Then the Japanese had learned of a technological civilization about which they knew very little; now Westerners learned of a highly developed film art about which they knew even less. It was lucky that they learned of Japanese film art through Kurosawa, for he was not merely a good director. He was one of the cinema's great masters, whose masterpiece, in this case, typically came from stimuli Eastern and Western: as he pointed out in a 1992 conversation with me (Cardullo, 166–181), from the spirit of the French avant-garde films of the 1920s, as well as from *Rashomon*'s literary source, two short stories about medieval Japan by the twentieth-century Japanese author Ryunosuke Akutagawa.

At the time *Rashomon* took the world by surprise, no one in the West could have known, of course, that Kurosawa was already a well-established director in his own country. Moreover, his career tells us something, prototypically, about the Japanese film world. He was born in Tokyo in 1910, the son of an army officer of samurai descent who became a teacher of physical education. Kurosawa, unattracted to his father's professions, studied painting at the Doshusha School of Western Painting. (Note its name.) Then in 1936 he saw an advertisement by a film studio looking for assistant directors; applicants were asked to send in an essay on the basic defects of Japanese films and how to remedy them. He replied, and—together with five hundred others—he was invited to try out further, with a screen treatment and an oral examination. Kurosawa was hired and assigned to assist an experienced director named Kajiro Yamamoto.

The details of Kurosawa's apprenticeship may be found in his 1982 book *Something Like an Autobiography*. But what strikes an outsider is that a newcomer's entry into Japanese film life, at least in those days, was organized and systematic—which is to say that the system of Japanese film training had adopted some of the tradition-conscious quality of Japanese culture generally. Kurosawa himself saw fate as well as chance at work in his choice of a career, as he revealed in *Something Like an Autobiography*:

> It was chance that led me to walk along the road to P.C.L. [Photo Chemical Laboratory, later absorbed into the Toho Motion Picture Company, for which Kurosawa made thirteen films from 1943 to 1958], and, in so doing, the road to becoming a film director, yet somehow everything that I had done prior to that seemed to point to it as an inevitability. I had dabbled eagerly in painting, literature, theater, music, and other arts and stuffed my head full of all the things that come together in the art of film. Yet I had never noticed that cinema was the one field where I would be required to make full use of all I had learned. (90)

Yamamoto—himself a director of both low-budget comedies and vast war epics—soon recognized the younger man's qualities, and did much to teach and

advance him during their six years of collaboration. While Kurosawa gained experience in the chief technical and production aspects of filmmaking, the core of his training under Yamamoto's guidance was in script-writing and editing. (In his autobiography, Kurosawa fondly quoted Yamamoto's remark that "If you want to become a film director, first write scripts" [127].) Thus was born a true *auteur*, who edited or closely supervised the editing of all his films and wrote or collaborated on the scripts of most of them (in addition to writing screenplays for the films of others, beginning in 1941 for Toho and ending in 1985 with Andrei Konchalovsky's *Runaway Train*).

That *auteur* made his first film, *Sanshiro Sugata*, in 1943, when he was thirty-three. Though in a 1964 interview in *Sight and Sound* he judged this picture to be a simple entertainment piece concerned with the judo tradition, the visual treatment of its story, through composition and montage, is innovative and exuberant. Clearly this was the work of an individual talent, even if, in Kurosawa's own estimation—as he explained to Donald Richie in the *Sight and Sound* interview—he finally discovered himself as a director only in 1948 with *Drunken Angel*. (This movie coincidentally represented his first collaboration with the actor Toshiro Mifune, who was to become a frequent protagonist in Kurosawa's *oeuvre*.) By 1950, with the completion of *Rashomon* and his début in the West, he had made eleven films.

During the whole of his career, which ended in 1993 with *Madadayo*, Kurosawa made thirty motion pictures, alternating between or even combining the two principal categories in Japanese cinema: the *gendai-mono*, or drama of modern life, and the *jidai-geki*, or historical drama. As Kurosawa discussed with me in the 1992 interview "A Visit with the *Sensei* of the Cinema," *Rashomon*'s story and setting fall into the category of *jidai-geki*, but his approach to the story does not conform to the characteristics of costume drama, action adventure, or romantic period-piece common to this genre. Through the use of several fragmentary and unreliable narratives, *Rashomon* in fact is modern and inventive in its telling. Whereas *Drunken Angel*, which belongs to the genre of *gendai-mono*, has a traditional or conventional narrative, even if it does treat contemporary social issues connected with the fate of postwar Japan.

Part of the impact of these two films, of *all* of Kurosawa's films, derives from the typical Japanese practice of using the same crew or "group" on each production. Kurosawa consistently worked with the cinematographers Takao Saito and Asakazu Nakai; the composers Fumio Hayasaka and Masaru Sato; the screenwriters Keinosuke Uegusa, Shinobu Hashimoto, and Ryuzo Kikushima; and with the art director Yoshiro Muraki. This "group" became a kind of family that extended to actors as well. Mifune and Takashi Shimura were the most prominent names of the virtual private repertory company that, through lifetime studio contracts, could survive protracted months of production on a film for the perfectionist Kurosawa by filling in, in between, with more normal four-to-eight-week shoots for other directors. Kurosawa was thus assured of getting the performance he wanted every time. Moreover, his own studio contract and consistent box-office record enabled him, until relatively late in his career, to exercise creativity never permitted lesser talents in Japan—creativity made possible by ever-increasing budgets and extended production schedules, and which

included Kurosawa's never being subjected to a project that was not of his own initiation and writing.

Such creative freedom allowed him to experiment, and one result was technical innovation. Kurosawa pioneered, for example, the use of long or extreme telephoto lenses and multiple cameras in the final battle scenes, in driving rain and splashing mud, of *Seven Samurai*. He introduced the use of widescreen shooting to Japan with the samurai movie *Hidden Fortress*, and further experimented with long lenses on the set of *Red Beard* (1965). A firm believer in the importance of motion-picture science, Kurosawa was also the first to use Panavision and multi-track Dolby sound in Japan, in *Kagemusha*. Finally, he did breathtaking work in his first color film, *Dodeskaden* (1970), where the ground of a shantytown on top of a garbage dump turned a variety of colors—from the naturalistic to shades of expressionism and surrealism—as a result of its reaction with chemicals in the soil.

As a result of the artistic control that made possible such technical innovativeness, together with his ever-expanding international reputation, Kurosawa got the epithet "Tenno," or "Emperor," conferred on him. But this epithet amounts less to any autocratic manner or regal raging on Kurosawa's part than to a popularized, reductive caricature of the film director at work. Among his peers, however—including Lindsay Anderson, Peter Brook, and Andrei Tarkovsky as well as the Americans Francis Ford Coppola, Steven Spielberg, and George Lucas—Kurosawa was a *sensei* of the medium, a respected mentor on the set as well as off it.

And nothing reveals the reason for this respect more than his approach to screenwriting. Since his earliest films Kurosawa had preferred not to write alone, because of the danger of one-sidedness in interpreting a major character. So, with his "team," he always retired to a hotel or a house isolated from distractions; sitting around a table, each one wrote, then took and rewrote the others' work. Afterwards they talked about what they had created and decided what to use. This was the first stage in an essentially *collaborative* process—the next stage of which was the careful rehearsing with the cast and the camera crew before any filming could take place.

The above facts, titles, dates, and statements, though certainly relevant, nonetheless do not convey the shape and quality of Kurosawa's career. Like other giants in film history, he seemed to grasp every possible contributory element in his own make-up, along with the core of this (relatively) new art, and mold them all to his needs, his wants, his discoveries, his troublings. To see a retrospective of his work, which I have done twice nearly completely—from the beginnings through *Drunken Angel*, *Rashomon*, *Ikiru*, and *Seven Samurai* to *Red Beard*, *Kagemusha*, and *Ran*—is consequently to see that, like every genius, Kurosawa invented his art. Of course his work can be analyzed, and analysis can enlighten, but it can't finally explain the result of the coalescence of all those elements, the transmutation that made him unique, imperial. (Hence Kurosawa's imperious complaint of critical over-determination in a 1975 conversation with Joan Mellen: "I have felt that my works are more nuanced and complex, and the critics—especially the Japanese ones—have analyzed them too simplistically" [Cardullo, 142])

Mozart himself dedicated six quartets to Haydn, from whom he had learned, but what he learned was more about being Mozart. What Kurosawa learned from his

teacher Yamamoto was more about being Kurosawa, which is to use action like hues on a canvas, shaded or enriched; to establish characters swiftly; to have a sure eye for pictures that are lovely in themselves yet always advance or augment the story, never delay or diminish it; to transform the screen before us into different shapes and depths and rivers of force, with stillness and with blaze; to make life seem to occur, but, like a true artist, to do this by showing less than would occur in real life. To be Kurosawa was also to use light and air subtly; to help your actors into the very breath of their characters; to create an environment through which a narrative can run like a stream through a landscape; to know infallibly where your camera ought to be looking and how to get it there; to create a paradoxically spare richness that grows out of dramatic juxtaposition, unforced yet forceful grouping, and a persistently *following* camera, rather than out of laid-on sumptuousness in detail or color.

Indeed, the very motion of Kurosawa's motion pictures is gratifying, particularly the complementary deployment of two fields of motion—that of the camera and the actors. This does something that only film can achieve: an unaffected yet affecting ballet in which the spectator, through the moving camera, himself participates. Kurosawa has long been celebrated for such camera movement, in the form of tracking shots. Prime examples: the woodcutter striding into the forest in *Rashomon* (described in detail below); the opening ride of "Macbeth" and "Banquo" in *Throne of Blood*; in *Kagemusha*, the many, many tracking shots of furiously galloping riders, flags aflutter, the sweep of which is marvelous since Kurosawa sometimes blends one shot into another going a different way.

Often the motion in this film and *Ran* is made by men only, with the camera still, as the men are hurled across our vision in strong, startling patterns. Soldiers will pour down from (say) the upper right corner of the screen diagonally while another stream moves from the middle of the lefthand edge and bends away as it meets the opposition. Such a vista turns the engagement of armies rolling away over hills into a terrible excitement. Occasionally, the pulse of motion is carried by one man alone among many still ones: early in *Kagemusha*, for example, a messenger runs frantically through an encamped army, through loafing and sleeping soldiers, bearing a message to his lord. As he plunges ahead, the men he passes come awake or start up, and in this simple strophe—the messenger's feet pounding past the resting or sleeping men—is a whole conviction of being in an army at war, with the lulls and starts of service.

Even when Kurosawa's subjects seemed slight for his abilities, as in *The Bad Sleep Well* (1960) and *High and Low* (1963), there runs through most of his work a conviction of mastery that is itself exciting. It is not cinematic magic of the kind to be found in later Fellini, nor is it *Angst* made visible as in the best of Bergman; instead there is an unadorned fierceness to Kurosawa's style, steely-fingered and sure. The many beauties for the eye seem the by-product—inevitable but still a by-product—of this fierceness and the burning, ironic view behind it. Indeed, what flames in many of his films, contemporary and costume, is hatred. In *Ikiru* it is hatred of death, but in most of them it is hatred of dishonor. Like most ironists and most intelligent users of melodrama, Kurosawa was thus an idealist in deliberately thin disguise.

Asked in 1966, in an interview in *Cahiers du cinéma*, whether he considered himself a realist or a romantic, he corroborated my view by replying, "I am at heart a sentimentalist" (Cardullo, xiv; my translation from the French). So much so that, upon accepting the 1990 Academy Award for lifetime achievement at the age of eighty, Kurosawa could remark, without false humility, that the honor came too early in his career, for he was still in the learning stages of his art. "Only through further work in cinema," he explained, "will I ever be able to come to a full understanding of this wonderful art form."

Let me now devote some space to fully understanding the wonderful art of what, perhaps in a tie with *Seven Samurai*, is probably Akira Kurosawa's greatest film, *Rashomon*. The script, by Kurosawa and Shinobu Hashimoto, is based on the short fiction of an author, Ryunosuke Akutagawa, who committed suicide at age thirty-five in 1927—in part because he felt insecure about the future (one that included Japan's soon-to-come invasion of Manchuria, in 1931, and thus for some the start of World War II). So well known in Japan that a literary prize has been established in his name, Akutagawa is most appreciated for his short stories (over 150), which have a modernity and accessibility influenced by his belief that literature should be universal and can bring together Western and Japanese cultures.

From the first Akutagawa story, "Rashomon" (1914), Kurosawa's film takes little more than a setting—the place where the picture begins, to which it returns, and where it closes—along with a mood of desolation caused by the havoc of civil war (including lawlessness, banditry, plague, and famine). "Rashomon" was the name of the largest gate in Kyoto ("Rasho" refers to city walls and "mon" means "gate"), the ancient capital of Japan; this gate, the southern entrance to the city, was built in the eighth century, and by the twelfth century, the time of the film (Heian Period, 794–1185), it was already in disrepair. In this great but dilapidated gate (representing the moral and physical decay of twelfth-century Japanese civilization), three men—a woodcutter, a Buddhist priest, and a tramp-like man called simply a commoner—huddle together out of a pouring rain and recount various versions of a violent death that took place recently in the vicinity.

The second Akutagawa story, "In a Grove" (1921), is the source of the murder narrative. There are some central facts: a samurai and his wife were traveling through a forest and were waylaid by a notorious bandit, who tied up the husband and wife and proceeded to have sex with the wife; the husband was killed, and his body was found by the woodcutter. Most important among these events, a man lies dead in the forest, and human beings need to assign a cause, to see a reason for a catastrophic fact. *Rashomon* the film becomes a search for this reason—and for the perpetrator. Rashomon the gate, according to a legend dramatized in the Noh play *Rashomon* (1420), by Kanze Nobumitsu, was inhabited by the rampaging demon Ibaraki Doji—which, along with the gate's ruinous state, may explain why Akutagawa chose this location for the murder narrative of "In a Grove."

Kurosawa's film has six sections; two of the six sections are "frames"—not the central incident itself but ways to tell about, or find out about, the incident. One of these two frames is primary, as two men, the woodcutter and the priest (representatives of the secular and sacred orders), feel compelled to tell their story to a

third man, a stranger (and, as a tramp-like character, something of a social outsider), perhaps to aid their search for answers, perhaps to ease their suspicion that the search has no end. The priest, who is desperate to believe in the goodness of all men, is at one end, while the commoner, a persistent (if wise and sometimes insightful) cynic, is at the other; the woodcutter is somewhere in between. Of the three, the commoner is most firmly entrenched in his position; both the priest and the woodcutter are shaky in theirs. It is this uncertainty shared by the two narrators that generates the telling of the tales. They say that what they have witnessed at a magistrate's office is far worse than famine, war, or natural disaster: the ultimate unknowability of truth. The violent rainstorm during which Kurosawa sets this first frame—a storm from which the only refuge is the pitiful shelter of the battered gate, and which believably keeps these three strangers together for a relatively long period—serves as a concrete, external image of both the internal, mental agony of the ongoing search and the outer, social instability of the warring Heian era.

The second frame is, in effect, a frame-within-a-frame: the testimony of the three participants in the incident before the magistrate, who is attempting to discover exactly what happened and why. Those participants—the bandit, the samurai's wife, and the samurai (channeled through a medium)—find themselves at the magistrate's headquarters, a kind of prison courtyard, where the woodcutter and the priest are also in attendance. The hearing takes place three days after the woodcutter first came upon the samurai's corpse and other evidence at the scene of the crime—indeed, who, we later learn, actually witnessed the entire incident. The priest is present because he saw the samurai while he was still alive, as he traveled through the forest with his wife. The priest "narrates" both the testimony of the samurai's wife and that of the samurai, as delivered through the voice of the (female) medium; the woodcutter "narrates" the bandit's testimony.

The remaining four sections are four different versions of what happened and why, each of them mirroring the attitudes, interests, perceptions, and personality of the witness in question. We see each version as it is recounted, and each one is different not only in human motivation, but also in emotional tone, chronological sequence, and visual style. The first version is that of the bandit, who was captured soon after the incident. His name is Tajomaru, and he is played as a sensual, virile, exuberant male by Toshio Mifune. Tajomaru's version emphasizes the physical sensations of the confrontation—the heat of the day, the glare of the sun, the sting of the gnats that he repeatedly swats—which Kurosawa depicts subjectively, from the bandit's point of view. When Tajomaru first sees the samurai's wife, a noblewoman, he describes her in sensual terms—as a cool breeze—and Kurosawa's camera immediately watches a gust of wind ripple through the leaves and across the characters' clothes, accompanied by the rippling tinkle of a celeste. Kurosawa's primary subjective, or "personalizing," device in the sequence, however, is the violent, furious pace of his tracking and panning shots, which translate Tajomaru's predatory stalking into visual terms. It is also the director's way of translating the way the bandit sees himself: as aggressive, restless, dominant, assertive.

The bandit says that he tricked the samurai, bound him, and assaulted the wife, who quickly became compliant after trying to kill Tajomaru with a dagger. According

to Tajomaru, his conquest of the wife was exactly that: an assertive, masculine act in which he subdued the woman first through his strength and then through his passion. Later, the bandit released the husband so that they could fight, and says he bested the samurai only after a long, fair, valiant combat ("He fought marvelously")—again the manly male displaying the essential characteristics of masculinity. Kurosawa's camera catches each man's flashy samurai swordsmanship and then the final kill as Tajomaru perceives it: with violent movement on the part of both participants, violent camera movement, and violent cutting. Having insisted on the duel so as not to be disgraced in the eyes of *two* men, the wife flees at its conclusion.

Next the priest gives the version he heard the wife give the magistrate. The woman tells a completely different story in style, tone, emphasis, and action. According to the way she sees both herself and the event, she is a "poor, helpless woman" (stereotypically "feminine," just as Tajomaru was stereotypically "masculine"). Although her account of events begins after the sexual consummation, she insists that she had no choice but to submit meekly to rape by a strong and determined animal (as opposed to the bandit's description of the woman as a struggling tiger cat). It serves both the wife's self-image and her credibility to avoid any references to the sex act itself. So, too, does the bandit play a very small role in her version of events, and the few glimpses the woman provides are of a whooping, subrational, subhuman savage, a grotesque caricature of the bandit's masculinity in his own version of the story, who disappears into the woods after he achieves sexual satisfaction.

The bandit scarcely exists for the wife because the real object of her concern is her husband, the only one whose reaction to the rape matters. And his reaction is a cold, pitiless, piercing stare, despite the fact that this woman has asked him to kill her. She then retrieves her dagger, still stuck in the trunk of a tree (a point of agreement with Tajomaru's version), as the bound husband continues to glare at her in hate, because his spouse did not resist sufficiently. She starts moving toward him in a frenzy of grief and shame, the dagger erect, yet his hypnotic stare continues. The music on the soundtrack pulses and swells, mirroring the tension of the moment for the wife, who has been caught in a kind of trance. The result is that she faints, and upon awaking she finds the dagger in the samurai's chest (a different murder weapon from the one in Tajomaru's account). The wife then tries to drown herself in a pond nearby but fails, only to be discovered by the police.

The third version of the story, also recounted by the priest, is that of the dead husband, a feat that Kurosawa accomplishes by using a female medium to summon the man's spirit from the other world and to serve as the vessel of his perceptions. As "he" tells "his" story, Kurosawa uses uniquely cinematic devices to convert the samurai's intangible and metaphysical presence into a palpable and credible reality. (The Japanese were masters at turning metaphysical spirits into concrete visual realities without making them seem ludicrous, as in Kurosawa's later *Throne of Blood* and Kenji Mizoguchi's *Ugetsu* [1953].) A man's voice issues from the woman's lips, and that voice is not just foreign to the body of the speaker (hence a kind of Brechtian defamiliarization that makes us ever aware that though the husband is dead, he not only speaks yet does so through the person of someone whose gender is the same as

that of the woman who may have killed him) but also strange in its pitch, tone, and timbre—echoing, breathy, hollow, and sounding like a phonograph record played at too slow a speed in an underground cavern. Kurosawa supports the bizarre vocal sound with a striking visual image: the medium's white veils float and flap violently in the wind that has suddenly entered the courtyard, clashing with the location's previous stillness and accompanying, perhaps even carrying, the voice of the male spirit from the supernatural world.

In contrast to the writhing agony of the medium is the quiet or stillness of the husband's version of the incident itself, toward which his attitude is one of sad resignation. For the husband, the wife hardly exists. For him, the essential relationship is between him and the bandit, two honorable men caught in the trap of a worthless woman. The samurai says that, after the seduction, his wife urged the bandit (who had at first offered to marry her) to murder him and take her away; the bandit refused and asked the husband if he should slay the wife. She then flees the scene and the bandit flees shortly afterward. According to the samurai, he does not die by being bested in combat (Tajomaru's version) or as the result of a hypnotic trance that impelled his wife toward him with a dagger (her story), but rather by his own hand: he kills himself with the dagger, according to the samurai's precepts of honor. Later, after his death, he says he felt someone remove the dagger from his body.

But the woodcutter, who we know (from an earlier traveling shot) discovered the samurai's body (as well as the wife's hat and veil) and who, we now find out, in fact witnessed the whole incident, sees all three versions as concoctions of lies—even the dead man's: "There was no dagger." (One thus cannot even depend on supernatural beings for the truth.) Under pressure from the commoner, the woodcutter then gives his version of events, the fourth, and the purportedly objective account of an outside observer. From his point of view, all three characters—the bandit, the samurai's wife, and the samurai—are weaker, smaller, and sillier than in their own stories. The woodcutter says that he came along just after the seduction and watched from behind a bush. The bandit was begging for forgiveness and blubberingly offering to marry the woman; the husband was a jittery coward who wondered why the wife didn't commit suicide; abandoning her tears, the wife herself turned into a selfish and cackling shrew who simply wanted the two men to fight over her. She cut her husband free with the dagger, but he was at first unwilling to fight for this woman he now despised. So she taunted him and Tajomaru into fighting—a brawl that was a parody of the noble duel recounted earlier by the bandit.

The bandit and the samurai both shake with fright, their hands trembling so convulsively that each can barely hold his sword, much less make contact with the other man's. Their whoops are not masculine assertions of strength (as in the bandit's account) but nervous squeals of sheer terror. Each man offers merely a very tentative poke of his sword before scurrying away for whatever cover he can find. One of the most comic of Kurosawa's images here is his shot of the tips of the two swords as they shakily enter the frame from opposite sides, trying (but not very hard) to cross in the middle, only to lose heart, pull back, and evacuate the frame altogether. (Kurosawa uses a similar comic image of weapons entering from opposite sides of the frame in *Yojimbo*.)

Accompanying these comic images is Kurosawa's soundtrack: no violent whoops or underscoring music (as in the bandit's version of the duel), but the sniveling sound of male whimpers, sobs, and whines, punctuated by the wife's hysterically vulgar cackles, which serve as the men's goad to combat—and occasionally scare them apart just when they are beginning to get close enough to tangle. Eventually the unadorned, de-glamorized fight blunders to its climax when the samurai loses his weapon and backs away (in a long, slow tracking shot rather than a rapid, violent one), trips, and—even as he whines for mercy—is slain by the bandit, who sobbingly and quiveringly pushes his sword home. The wife subsequently runs away. Somewhat dazed, the bandit steals the samurai's horse and rides away from the scene with the victim's sword as well as his own.

The "true" version of what happened is never established. *Rashomon*'s final sequence, which returns us to the ruins of Rashomon Gate, provides Kurosawa's synthesis of the conflicting accounts and something approaching resolution of the action's ambiguity. The three men in the gate are now in various states: depression about human beings in general (the woodcutter), sardonic glee over the nature of what he has heard (the commoner), and desperate hope for mankind (the priest). As the woodcutter's story finishes, the three men suddenly hear a baby crying in a corner of the huge gate—an infant obviously abandoned to the storm and the ruins by its parents. The commoner tries to steal the baby's garments with the following justification: "We can't live unless we act selfishly these days."

When the woodcutter stops him, the commoner turns on him fiercely, calls him a hypocrite, and accuses him of stealing the mysteriously missing dagger—which appeared in all versions of the story except the woodcutter's. The woodcutter does not explicitly admit the theft but he does not deny it, either. The suggestion is that (1) he, too, is capable of acting selfishly, of stealing from victims of misfortune; and (2) he is not as objective a reporter as he seemed to be, for he was also a participant in the incident. The woodcutter appears to have something to hide, so it has been to his advantage to make the commoner and the priest believe that there was no dagger (as he has maintained all along). The commoner responds by slapping the woodcutter, laughing (for he perceives the ironies that make the woodcutter no better a man than he), and walking off into the rain.

After several dissolves signifying the lapse of psychological time and a radical transformation from darkness to light, the woodcutter then reaches for the infant. The priest's assumption is that he wants to steal the baby's remaining clothing, as the priest now believes that people act from the most selfish and base of motives. Instead, the woodcutter offers to adopt the child, to take him into his already large family, to which one addition will not make much difference. Perhaps he does this as penance for his (presumed) lie about the dagger and its disappearance, perhaps as a token of his hope for human hope. Whatever the case, the priest is now moved to declare, "Because of you, I have regained my faith in man." The rain then suddenly stops, the woodcutter walks away from Rashomon Gate with his new child in his arms, and Kurosawa's tracking camera moves with him as he leaves the ruins of the gate behind him. The sun now finally shines.

Mysterious though it may be—and, in the above description, I have tried to clarify as much of the mystery as possible—*Rashomon* is not essentially a mystery film. Nothing in this picture, no set of subtly placed clues and no pattern of character weaknesses as well as strengths, can finally answer such questions as: Was the wife raped, taken by force, or was she seduced and therefore a willing sexual participant; did the samurai die by sword or dagger, and who actually killed him in the end? For Kurosawa does not intend us to solve a "whodunit" in this case. Nor are we to judge which of the participants is telling *the* truth. (As the commoner says, "Often men won't speak the truth, even to themselves.") The mystery here is rather of another order: the mystery of human existence itself. In this sense, *Rashomon* deserves the status of a major artifact of modern art because it shares certain root affinities with the art of the exemplar of modernity, Pablo Picasso. That is, the character of the film is *multiform*—its multiple perspectives in time are analogous to the multiple spatial perspectives of cubist (and early futurist) painting. The multiplicity in both dimensions analyzes a single reality into its component, dialectic, resonant, competing, antagonistic parts. *Rashomon*'s theme, then, is just that: not simply that truth is contradictory in nature on account of its subjectivism, or that absolutes are impossible, but that reality itself is a complex of perspectives, some of which conflict with each other but none of which, despite the appearance of contradiction, cancel each other out.

Moreover, the very quality of Kurosawa's art opens up this version of relativism to reveal the element that *generates* the relativism: the element of ego, of self, of self-interest or even vanity. Finally, *Rashomon* deals with the preservation of self, an idea that—in this film—outlasts life. That idea does not concern the sanctity of each individual as a social or political concept, not the value of each soul as a religious concept, but stark, fundamental *amour propre*. The bandit wants to preserve and defend his ego, the wife hers, and the husband, dead and out of his body, wants the same. Even the woodcutter, who has little *amour propre* to protect, is forced to tell a more complete version of his story (as an eyewitness of everything that happened) in self-defense. As Kurosawa himself put it,

> Human beings are unable to be honest with themselves about themselves. They cannot talk about themselves without embellishing. This script portrays such human beings—the kind who cannot survive without lies to make them feel they are better people than they really are. It even shows this sinful need for flattering falsehood going beyond the grave—even the character who dies cannot give up his lies when he speaks to the living through a medium. Egoism is a sin the human being carries with him from birth; it is the most difficult to redeem. (Richie, 1987: 116)

Stated another way (by the priest), "Mortals are weak—that's why they have to tell lies." Ego underlies all, then: this is what *Rashomon* says. What is good and what is horrible in our lives, in the way we affect other lives, grows from ego: not merely the biological impulse to stay alive but to have that life with some degree of pride. In the Christian lexicon, pride is the first deadly sin; but in our daily lives, Christian or

not, Westerner or Easterner, we know that this sin is at least reliable. We can depend on it for motivating power. All of us acknowledge that we ought to be moved primarily by love; all of us know that we are moved primarily by self. In demonstrating this, *Rashomon* is a ruthlessly honest film. It reaches down to a quiet, gigantic truth nestled in every one of us. Ultimately what the film leaves us with, though, are candor and consolation: if we can't be saints, at least we can be understanding sinners—or understandingly human.

Perhaps, in the wake of Japan's defeat in World War II and subsequent occupation—as a result of this nation's own overweening pride and selfish empire-building—*Rashomon* becomes a parable (set in the distant past so as to give the mid-twentieth-century Japanese audience "telescopic" objectivity) of life in postwar Japan. To wit: Japan at the time was in need of a belief on which to found a duty. Surely the epilogue of *Rashomon* points, after the unanswerable questions raised in the four versions of the same event, to a basic belief and duty onto which the Japanese can hold. The old, pre-war vision of a hopeful future springing from a glorious past is lost, and the way to its recovery lies through a maze of dubious thoughts, or selective truths, about misfortune, guilt, and shame. Yet there is a new Japan in the aftermath of defeat—a Japan that demands love and care, like the abandoned child, not because of any auspicious or legitimate beginning, but because it is alive and will perish without them. Thus might Kurosawa be considered the most existential of Japanese filmmakers, for he suggests in *Rashomon* that a person is what he *does*, in the present; what that person feels, thinks, or intends—or felt, thought, and intended in the past—is unknowable, even by the person himself.

Even before *Rashomon*, in the aftermath of the devastation caused to Japan by the Second World War, Kurosawa had embarked on a series of films (*No Regrets for Our Youth* [1946], *Drunken Angel*, *Stray Dog*) that illuminated the despair and confusion of the period and offered narratives of personal heroism as models for social recovery; he thereby sought, through the moral urgency of his art, to produce a legacy of hope for a ruined nation. Subsequent to *Rashomon*—at the height of the Cold War, following the detonation of the first hydrogen bomb in 1956—Kurosawa was maintaining the same stance, unfatalistically declaring (Wakeman, 604) that his aim as a filmmaker was "to give people strength to live and face life; to help them live more powerfully and happily." (The threat of all-out atomic warfare forms the subject of Kurosawa's *Record of a Living Being*, which is a literal, "circumstantial" rendition of this film's Japanese title, whereas the fateful title of the same picture upon its release in the United States and England was *I Live in Fear*.) Around twenty years later, at the time of *Kagemusha*, he still had not capitulated to fate, even though he did say the following in *Something Like an Autobiography*: "I think it's impossible in this day and age to be optimistic" (185). Nonetheless seeing possibilities in the medium of film, Kurosawa maintained that he "would like to be able to create hope somewhere, under certain circumstances" (Wakeman, 604). He did so in *Rashomon* and subsequent pictures, and, though he is deceased, he continues to do so today—through the medium of film, of his surviving films.

Its thematic richness aside, if it's possible to speak of *Rashomon* apart from its meaning, why should this film have had such a strong impact worldwide? One general

reason for the film's impact is its cultural accessibility. Many Japanese directors, including at least one who is on Kurosawa's creative plane, Yasujiro Ozu, are more difficult to approach, more "Japanese." Kurosawa has always resisted being labeled a Westerner in any sense that makes him seem unsympathetic to his own culture, but he has always asserted that "the Western and the Japanese live side by side in my mind naturally, without the least sense of conflict" (Cardullo, 74). His fine-arts training and his response to Ryunosuke Akutagawa, of all authors, support this thesis. Also, as he said many times during his lifetime, he greatly admires American directors, especially John Ford, William Wyler, and Frank Capra.

So, at the Venice Film Festival in 1951, those who might have expected *Rashomon* to be couched in the aesthetics of Noh or Kabuki—which Kurosawa had indeed used elsewhere—found instead a work that was intrinsically Japanese yet certainly not remote in style, subject, or dynamics. But, of course, there are other values in this picture that give it stature, values much larger and deeper than Kurosawa's cosmopolitanism. Chief among these, I think, are three particular beauties: the acting; the use of blocks, or plaques, of visual texture; and the quality of motion in the forest scenes.

First, the acting. As the woodcutter, Takashi Shimura runs through *Rashomon* like a quiet stream of human concern—human enough to be himself found out in apparent wrongdoing. Shimura, who was trained in the theater, had already played in eight pictures for Kurosawa (among them *Drunken Angel* and *Stray Dog*) and later gave very different yet equally wonderful performances for this director in *Seven Samurai* and *Ikiru*. In Kurosawa's films of the forties and early fifties, it was he who often supplied the moral center. Masayuki Mori, perhaps best known for his work in Kurosawa's *The Idiot*, plays the samurai with majestic silence; he also later starred in pictures by Mikio Naruse and Kon Ichikawa. The samurai's wife, Machiko Kyo—the first Japanese actress to be advertised for her sexuality rather than her domestic virtues—began her career as a dancer and moved into cinema in 1949, later appearing in such films as Mizoguchi's *Ugetsu*, Kinugasa's *Gate of Hell* (1953), Ozu's *Floating Weeds* (1959), and Teshigahara's *The Face of Another* (1966). The four versions of the rape/seduction-cum-murder/suicide in *Rashomon* provide, in effect, four women to play, each of whom this actress draws precisely.

But the outstanding performance, partly because it is the most colorful role, is that of Toshiro Mifune as the bandit. Mifune, by the time of *Rashomon* and *Seven Samu*rai the best-known Japanese actor in the world, began in films in 1947 after five years in the Japanese army. He made four Kurosawa pictures before *Rashomon* and made many subsequent ones, including *Throne of Blood*, *The Lower Depths*, *Yojimbo*, and *Red Beard*. He has said of Kurosawa, "There is nothing of note I have done without Kurosawa, and I am proud of none of my pictures but those which I have done with him" (Richie, 1996: 237). Kurosawa has told the supporting story that, while the company was waiting to start *Rashomon*, they ran off some travelogue films to pass the time, including one about Africa. In it there was a lion roaming around. "I noticed it and told Mifune that that was just what I wanted him to be" (Richie, 1996: 77). Mifune succeeded. He gives one of the most purely feral performances on film—

animalistic in both the bestial and elemental senses, a man concentrated wholly on physical satisfactions and with a fierce power to satisfy them.

The second important aspect of *Rashomon* is the use of blocks, or plaques, of visual texture. Each of the three main locations of the narrative has a distinct visual "feel": the big gate; the courtyard of the magistrate's headquarters, or police station, where the witnesses testify; and the forest where the stories of rape or seduction, and of murder or suicide, take place. The gate scenes, as noted, are drenched in rain. Until the very last moments, each of these gate scenes is seen—and heard—through torrents, frequently emphasized by being shot from ground level so that we see the rain pounding the earth. The fall of the rain is often matched by a vertical, diminishing view of the scene from above.

In the testimony scenes the witnesses kneel before us, motionless. We never see the magistrate, who "is" the camera. In contrast to the gate scenes, these courtyard scenes are mostly sunlit (in the hopeful service of truth), and the composition is horizontal. Three great parallel bands stretch across the screen: one of shadow, close to us, in which the testifying witness kneels (one of them, the bandit, with horizontal ropes tied around his body); one band of sunlight behind the shadow, in which the preceding witnesses kneel; and the top of the courtyard wall behind them. The camera rarely moves in these scenes, as Kurosawa creates a tension between the violent tales being recounted and the serenity of the picture we observe.

The third plaque of texture, the forest, is dappled with sunlight and filled with movement—horizontal as the characters move forward, vertical as the camera frequently looks up at the sun as well as the surrounding tall trees. These three distinctive textures—the forest, the courtyard, and the gate—are, first, aids to our understanding of a complex narrative: we know immediately where we are at every moment. They also provide a contrapuntal element: the somber setting at the gate for the conversation among the troubled woodcutter, the concerned priest, and the cynical commoner; the quiet place of recollection and testimony at the police station; the kinetically lighted and composed setting in the forest for the rape/seduction and murder/suicide.

The last major aesthetic component of *Rashomon* is the quality of motion in those forest scenes. Kurosawa once said:

> I make use of two or three cameras…almost all the time…I cut the film freely and splice together the pieces which have caught the action most forcefully, as if flying from one piece to another. (Cardullo, 27)

He made this use of *motion* in motion pictures uniquely his own, and never more "forcefully" than in the forest scenes of *Rashomon*. In the forest, where there is danger to people and, more important, danger to truth, the camera hovers, darts, glides, and swoops, like a safely skimming bird.

The very opening of the first forest sequence sets the style. Near the end of the gate scene with which the film begins, we are looking down from high above at the men crouched below out of the rain. We cut to a close-up of the woodcutter's face as he begins to tell his story—the first, abbreviated version of it, before he later tells the

whole truth following the samurai's account of what occurred. (Thus, of the four tellers, the woodcutter is the only one we categorically know has lied, for he told a different tale earlier.) Then there is a sharp cut to the bright sun, seen through tree branches as the camera travels forward—a cut accompanied by the sudden entrance of strong, rhythmic music. The sequence that follows is dazzling: dazzling both in the virtuosity of the shooting and editing and in the way that these techniques are used to create mood and point.

The next shot is of the woodcutter's axe, on his shoulder, gleaming in the sun as he strides along. Then, in sixteen shots over the next two minutes, the camera precedes him as he walks toward us, follows him, and, in one especially beautiful moment, arcs across toward him as he strides in our direction, crosses in front of him as he approaches, then follows him from the other side. More than underscoring the burst of sunlight and movement into the film, this camera motion does two things. First, in the moving camera's taking of a number of different angles from which to photograph the woodcutter, it is signaling one of *Rashomon*'s major themes: what could be called not simply the relativity of truth but the subjectivity of all human perception, depending upon the perspective or angle of the person doing the telling or perceiving. Second, the camera motion here sets a tone of comment, of near-teasing, implying, "Stride on, stride on. An ordinary day's work, you think, woodcutter? Stride on. You'll see."

And he does see. The woodcutter and the camera's ballet around him halt suddenly when he spies a woman's hat hanging on a bush. He and the camera resume—and stop again when he spies a man's hat, a length of rope, and a bag. Again he and his observer resume—and this time he halts in horror. We see his face through the upright, death-rigid arms of the slain samurai. The *camera*, fulfilling its promise, looks through those arms at the woodcutter's face, seeing. This marvelously intricate and graceful dance of the camera continues through all versions of the forest story. In a sense, we are always aware of it; it would be overly reticent if we were not. Similarly, the language of a good poem is enjoyable at the same time that the poem moves to something for which the language is only the visible or audible sign.

Kurosawa is thus always sure to make his camera movement, wonderful in itself, inseparable from what he treats. For instance, as noted earlier, the bandit and the samurai fight twice, once in the bandit's story, once in the woodcutter's. In the first, the men fence brilliantly. The second fight, however, is a frantic brawl in which both men look foolish. In both encounters, the camera leaps around them, heightening the fever, but the camera rhythms and perspectives match the quality of the fight in each instance: in the first fight, the camera behaves like a divine observer or referee; in the second, like a devilish, devolving imp.

Now since all this camera movement is silken smooth, at the furthest remove from self-indulgent handheld improvisation, every smallest action of the players and of Kurosawa's camera (in the hands of cinematographer Kazuo Miyagawa) had to be planned in detail. Tracks had to be built on which the cameras could dolly. Since these sequences were obviously shot outdoors, in a real forest, every inch of the camera's traverse had to be prepared, sometimes in a way that allowed the camera to come around and look back—without a break—at the place it had just left, without

revealing the tracks on which it had traveled. These technical details of preparation would not be our concern except for what underlies them: a realization of how thoroughly Kurosawa had to know in advance what he was doing and why. A film director does not have the freedom of inspiration, in sequences of this kind, that a theater director or choreographer has. Long-range design is of the essence here: and the quicksilver insight of these designs—their feeling of spontaneous motion and positioning—is extraordinary.

The feeling of liberation *Rashomon* brought to young filmmakers, then, was less a response to its enigmatic theme than to Kurosawa's camerawork—specifically, his flouting of the established rules of narrative cinema ten years before the French New Wave made it fashionable. Seeking to regain the aesthetic freedom and glory of silent film, Kurosawa breaks the 180° rule (that two characters in a scene should maintain the same left/right relationship to one another, and that the camera should not pass over the invisible 180° axis connecting the two subjects), thus reversing spatial relationships; juxtaposes long shots and close-ups and shots of contrary motion; displays a bold, inventive use of camera movement as cinematic punctuation, as well as of visual dynamics (especially triangular composition among the two different trios of characters) as thematic comment; and restores to respectability a mode of transition that had once flourished but almost disappeared with the development of the sound film, the wipe, which becomes and remained for Kurosawa an element of style. (It did so for him because, in giving the impression that only a short length of time has elapsed, the wipe also suggests—particularly through repeated use—the rushing or surging of the action, its relentlessness and even inevitability.) Thus, many passages in *Rashomon* are composed as silent sequences of pure film, in which the imagery, ambient sound, and the musical score carry the action.

Despite *Rashomon*'s camerawork, that 1951 Venice Festival audience must have had a bit of a shock when the music began for that first forest scene (to be heard again, particularly during the wife's account of what happened to her and her samurai husband). Many have noted its strong resemblance to Maurice Ravel's *Boléro* (1928). Not by accident. Kurosawa told his composer, Fumio Hayasaka, to "write something like Ravel's *Boléro*" (Richie, 1987: 19). Apparently the Ravel piece was not then well-known in Japan and had not become something of the self-parody that it now is to Western ears. Western music can be heard in many Kurosawa pictures; in his films set in the present, it is often used to show the alteration of Japanese culture in the postwar period. Here Kurosawa apparently thought that he was appropriating a helpful Western vitality for *Rashomon*. But whatever the effect of that music was or is on Japanese ears, it is still bothersome to Europeans and Americans.

Nonetheless, Kurosawa's vision in *Rashomon*, his steely yet sympathetic sense of drama, his power to make the screen teem with riches yet without any heavy-breathing lushness, his overwhelming faculties of rhythmic control that translate emotion into motion, electric excitement into exquisite form—all of these make this director big enough to bear a blemish. If we can forgive Dickens for naming one of his female characters Rosa Bud (in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, from 1870), we can forgive Kurosawa for his Ravel imitation. We can do more than forgive him.

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## FILMOGRAPHY: KEY FILMS WITH UNRELIABLE NARRATORS OR NARRATION

*The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920), directed by Robert Wiene

*Citizen Kane* (1941), directed by Orson Welles

*The Woman in the Window* (1944), directed by Fritz Lang

*Detour* (1945), directed by Edgar G. Ulmer

*The Locket* (1946), directed by John Brahm

*Possessed* (1947), directed by Curtis Bernhardt

*Stage Fright* (1950), directed by Alfred Hitchcock

*Rashomon* (1950), directed by Akira Kurosawa

*The Innocents* (1961), directed by Jack Clayton

*Lolita* (1962), directed by Stanley Kubrick

*Repulsion* (1965), directed by Roman Polanski

*The Tenant* (1976), directed by Roman Polanski

*The Tin Drum* (1979), directed by Volker Schlöndorff

*The Usual Suspects* (1995), directed by Bryan Singer

*Lost Highway* (1997), directed by David Lynch

*Fight Club* (1999), directed by David Fincher

*Memento* (2000), directed by Christopher Nolan

*American Psycho* (2000), directed by Mary Harron

*A Beautiful Mind* (2001), directed by Ron Howard

*Hero* (2002), directed by Zhang Yimou

*Big Fish* (2003), directed by Tim Burton

*Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004), directed by Michel Gondry

*Shutter Island* (2010), directed by Martin Scorsese

*We Need to Talk About Kevin* (2011), directed by Lynne Ramsay

*Gone Girl* (2014), directed by David Fincher

# Satyajit Ray's *Pather Panchali*



## CHEKHOVIAN CINEMA

The work of Satyajit Ray has been called Chekhovian, and it is to the extent that, within seemingly quiet microcosms that cut across the various social classes of this director's native Bengal, and with apparent artlessness, his cinema dramatizes the clash between the India of old and the new India beset by political, economic, and cultural change. Like Chekhov, Ray refused to take sides either with characters or with ideologies; since he was interested above all in the complexly human in such films as *The Music Room* (1958) and *The Chess Players* (1977), there are no heroes or villains to be found in his *oeuvre*, no simple winners and losers. ("Villains bore me," Ray remarked in one of his many interviews [Cooper, 11].)

But, unlike the eclectic impressionist Chekhov (except on the most superficial level) and like the neorealist purist Zavattini, Ray was also concerned with the undramatic in life, with the documenting of life's everyday currents for their own intrinsic—as well as intrinsically pleasurable—sake. And it is the tension in his films—most notably in the famous Apu trilogy (1955–59) of childhood, youth, and manhood—between this will to witness undifferentiated dailiness with reverential

wonder and the countervailing determination to create cinedramatic order-cum-meaning out of shapelessness, which gives them their enduring distinction.

That distinction is not entirely lost in his last films, but it becomes blurred by the intrusion of explicitly ethical questions into the realm of the aesthetic, of ethical imperiousness on aesthetic richness. To continue the Russian connection, the same "intrusion" occurs in the late Tolstoy, who himself speculated in 1897 on the relationship between art and morality:

> The aesthetic and the ethical are two arms of one lever: to the extent to which one side becomes longer and heavier, the other side becomes shorter and lighter. As soon as a man loses his moral sense, he becomes particularly responsive to the aesthetic. (Christian, 325)

And vice versa, of course, as we see in Ray's 1989 adaptation of *An Enemy of the People* (1882; next to *The Pillars of Society* [1877], Ibsen's most overtly ethical, and therefore least implicative, play), which he made after a five-year hiatus in his filmmaking career that was caused by two heart attacks. Ray followed *An Enemy of the People* with *Branches of the Tree* (1990)—about the moral spectrum encompassed by three sons who gather around their seventy-year-old father after he has been struck down by a heart attack—and with his last film, *The Stranger* (a.k.a. *The Visitor*), in 1991.

## REGIONAL ROOTS, SHAKESPEAREAN SCOPE

For most of his career, Ray was dedicated to putting both the nature (in both senses of the word) and the truth of his country on celluloid, and this dedication gives his work a rooted, authentic quality that most movies—certainly most American films—lack. And it is to early and middle Ray that I would now like to switch my focus, so that I may praise rather than damn him. Once asked *why* he made films, Ray replied, "Apart from the actual creative work, filmmaking is exciting because it brings me closer to my country and my people" (Cardullo, viii). In some thirty-five years of moviemaking, Ray may have been drawn closer to India, but it cannot be said that the country was drawn closer to Ray. Two reasons account for this fact. First, most Indian moviegoers prefer the popular romances, adventures, and comedies that dominate this country's gigantic film industry; second, and more important, Ray is in the literal sense a regional filmmaker. He lived his entire life in Calcutta in West Bengal (East Bengal became Bangladesh after its independence in 1971), a state in northeast India, and made all of his motion pictures—with only two exceptions—in the local language, Bengali.

Thus, in a country of some one billion people, Ray's films are in a language spoken by only 120 million, or twelve percent of the total population; the majority language of India is Hindi, and Bombay is the center of Hindi-language cinema (or "Bollywood," as this movie industry is called). The result is that India's preeminent and world-renowned film director remains known in his own country more by reputation than by his films (very few of which, by the way, have not won some kind

of an award), which go largely unseen except by an educated or sophisticated audience limited to his indigenous region of Bengal. Not that Ray's pictures were financial losses; almost all of them showed substantial profits on the home market, even before foreign sales were taken into account (which is one of the reasons, aside from his international prestige, that, as he himself exulted on more than one occasion, he "had the freedom as an artist to do whatever came to mind" [Cardullo, viii]).

Ray first came to public attention in the mid-fifties with *Pather Panchali* (a.k.a. *Song of the Road*, 1955), a film dealing with a boy's coming of age in a Bengali village early in the twentieth century. A human document of timeless simplicity and exquisite beauty, *Pather Panchali* made an enormous impact at the 1956 Cannes Festival (where, largely through the efforts of the French film critic André Bazin, it won a special jury prize) and introduced Indian cinema to the West as momentously as *Rashomon* (1950) had earlier done for Japanese films. This first feature also served Ray's ambition, in his own words, to create "a style, an idiom…which would be uniquely and recognizably Indian" (*India Today*, 72). That style consisted of a slow rhythm (using long takes, deep focus, and minimal camera movement) determined by nature itself, by the landscape and the countryside. And, according to Ray, even the script of *Pather Panchali* "had to retain a rambling quality—the very one of the source novel—because that quality contained a clue to the achievement of authenticity: life in a poor Indian village *does* ramble" (*Our Films, Their Films*, 33).

*Pather Panchali* is the first part of what became known as the Apu trilogy, a national film epic unlike anything—in size and soul—since Mark Donskoi's Gorky trilogy of 1938–40. Ray's trilogy established his reputation, and, though his subsequent pictures may not match the authenticity, sincerity, beauty, and magic of *Pather Panchali*, *Aparajito* (a.k.a. *The Unvanquished*, 1956), and *The World of Apu* (1959), they boast a bolder, more complex style (including the use of montage for dramatic effect, as opposed to editing that limits itself to following the natural flow of human action) and a sharper, more pointed voice. Moreover, Ray's *oeuvre* reveals a wide range of thematic interests: regarded at first as a poetic chronicler of Bengali village life, he showed himself adept at making films that incorporate contemporary urban life, Indian history, even musical fantasy. As Ray himself once declared, "I find I'm inimical to the idea of making two or three similar films in succession. I'm interested in many aspects of life…and I expect to keep shifting genres and venturing into new fields—thematically as well as stylistically" (Cardullo, viii).

Indeed, the exceptional range of milieu, period, genre, and tone in Satyajit Ray's work recalls that of Shakespeare himself. Ray's films are about almost all strata of society and walks of life: the upper class (*Kanchenjungha* [1962] and *Home and the World* [1984]); the middle class (*The Big City* [1963], *Days and Nights in the Forest* [1969]); and the illiterate working class (*The Postmaster*, Part I of *Three Daughters* [1961], and *The Deliverance* [1981]). There are films about the village (*Pather Panchali* and *Distant Thunder*); about small-town life (*The Expedition* [1962], *An Enemy of the People*); and about the metropolis of Calcutta (*The Adversary* [1970] and *The Middleman* [1975]). We find in addition works about the distant past (*The Goddess* [1960], *The Lonely Wife* [1964]); the past

within living memory (*The World of Apu, The Music Room*); and the immediate present (*Branches of the Tree* and *The Stranger*).

Ray also produced comedies (*The Philosopher's Stone* [1958], *The Holy Man* [1965]); musical fantasies (*The Adventures of Goopy and Bagha* [1968] and *Kingdom of Diamonds* [1980]); a ghost story (*The Last Jewels*, Part II of *Three Daughters*); and detective stories, mainly but not only for children, set in Rajasthan and Benares (*The Golden Fortress* [1974] and *The Elephant God* [1978]). Not to mention five documentary films, one of them on Ray's legendary artistic mentor, the Nobel Prize-winning poet Rabindranath Tagore (1961), and another about his father, Sukumar Ray (1987), himself an accomplished writer, painter, and photographer (who died of blackwater fever when Satyajit, his only child, was two years old). Taken together, then, Ray's films seem to encompass an entire culture—that of the Bengalis. And I daresay that this is an achievement unmatched by any other filmmaker in the history of the medium.

## PATHER PANCHALI

Our first look at Apu, the young protagonist of *Pather Panchali*, is a close-up of his eye. He's a little boy, but it's a very large eye that emerges from beneath the rough blanket in which he's been wrapped—a big, intelligent, and terribly innocent eye that will, in the course of this film, *Aparajito*, and *The World of Apu*, see a lot of life and a lot of death, almost (but not quite) too much to bear. Apu, we come to understand, is by nature an observer of the world around him, which in *Pather Panchali* consists entirely of a tiny, remote rural village in West Bengal in the 1910s.

Apu's family is small: his father, Harihar Roy, often absent, is an itinerant Hindu priest and a would-be writer; his older sister, Durga, pilfers and yearns; an ancient "auntie," Indir Thakrun, comes and goes, singing songs as she waits to die; his mother, Sarbajaya, bustles around in a state of constant anxiety, mostly about money. (The Roys are desperately poor: the modest house that Harihar calls the "ancestral home" is crumbling around them.) There are animals, too, of course, and a few scattered neighbors; sometimes a sweets seller wanders by, and once in a blue moon a troupe of traveling actors visits the village to put on a show. For a curious boy like Apu, this doesn't seem much in the way of stimulation—and perhaps initially not for a movie audience either, accustomed as we are (and were even sixty years ago) to wider vistas than these. But to a child's eye, everything is marvelous, and by the end of *Pather Panchali*, Ray has taught us to see the world with eyes like that.

To a child's eye, everything is marvelous—this is what accounts for the episodic or open form of *Pather Panchali*, the progression of events in which interest derives from the observance of character and location, of atmosphere and landscape, rather than from the workings of plot. The narrative, as such, is scant: Harihar, the father, must leave home to make a living in the city; Durga, his daughter, dies of fever; Apu, the son, watches the world as it changes around him; and by the end of the film, in 1920, the Roy family is forced by circumstances, including the destruction of their house by a storm, to leave their native village for the holy city of Benares. The viewer's attention is thus engaged less by *what* happens—the poor family's struggle

to survive in their rural ancestral home and the gradual coming of age of Apu—than by the *way* in which it happens.

That way frequently involves the annotation of characters' feelings by referring to the natural world. The monsoon clouds in *Pather Panchali*, for example, seem to gather to themselves the pent-up emotions of the mother and her children. When Apu and Durga run to the edge of the village to watch a steam train pass, the camera registers soft white tufts of flax waving in the air—before the train itself appears, seeming to hurtle across the slow and soothing movements of the flax. And in the moment toward the conclusion of *Pather Panchali* when Apu finds the necklace that the deceased Durga had earlier denied having stolen and throws it into a pond, we watch as the weeds on the surface close in and the water slowly returns to the way it was. Such a distancing perspective, if you will, is frequently complemented by a similar device: the cutting away from an emotional scene or moment to a shot of the character who observes it, as when the father breaks down in grief over the body of his dead daughter and Ray cuts to the young Apu standing apart, watching his grieving father.

The invocation of the "poetic," in this manner, was a crucial one for Satyajit Ray. When he adapted Bibhutibhusan Bandyopadhyay's 1929 novel *Pather Panchali* to the screen, Ray's special additions were what he referred to as poetic elements—and these are the details that audiences often remember vividly after seeing the picture. Working as a graphic artist for Signet Press in 1944, Ray created the illustrations for a new abridged edition of Bandyopadhyay's novel, and his additions to the film version of the book can themselves be considered illustrations, of a poetic as well as visual kind. Working with a cinematographer (Subrata Mitra) who was a still photographer but had never shot a feature, an editor (Dulal Dutta) and a production designer (Bansi Chandragupta) who had scarcely more experience than the director did, and with technical equipment of variable quality, Ray simply paid close attention to his unfamiliar surroundings, and it was enough: everything in *Pather Panchali* seems not just freshly seen but freshly imagined.

Indeed, the sights on the screen are often rapturous, despite the meanness of the settings. It is especially interesting to note how in the most commonplace daily actions—gesturing, walking, carrying a jug—these people move beautifully, how in the poorest home the bowls and platters, the windings of the ragged shawls, have some beauty. This is not dainty aestheticism but an ingrained part of the villagers' ethos: a belief in more than one kind of reality, which is deeply moving in view of their daily fight against starvation. And even without much dialogue, the sound itself in this movie is mysteriously eloquent: the torrents of a rainstorm make a terrifying, almost white noise; the old aunt's scratchy songs have a lonesome grandeur; the voices of children at play, high-pitched and constant, sound like birdsong; a train whistle blows, from time to time, in the distance and conjures up dreams of faraway places.

Ray never had a finished script for *Pather Panchali*: it was made, significantly, from drawings and the notes attending them. Perhaps that is what accounts for the film's mood of sustained visual contemplation, as well as for its remarkable evenness of rhythm. In making a film whose narrative depends almost entirely on the rhythmic

arrangement of minute observations, the first-time director was in some sense putting into practice one theory about the fundamental flaw of his country's cinema. For Indian directors had tended to overlook the musical aspect of a film's structure, the sense of a rhythmic pattern existing in time. But it such a pattern is not lacking in *Pather Panchali*. The story of this film may be episodic, but it moves forward with the force of a held thought; it flows with the serenity and nobility of a big river.

As such, the movie's tempo is deliberate, its style lyrical and meditative rather than conventionally dramatic. Scenes flit across the screen and disappear like fireflies, small wonders of a moment. In the calm before the storm that is one of the film's most significant events, insects—dragonflies and water striders—skim the surface of the river, lighting and taking off and lighting again in a lengthy, ecstatic montage, scored to the furious strains of a Ravi Shankar raga, and you can't take your eyes off the scene any more than a child would be able to. The "music" Ray makes in this sequence, as well as in other sequences of *Pather Panchali*, evokes Wordsworth's own music in his "Ode on Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood" (1807): "There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream, / The earth, and every common sight, / To me did seem / Apparelled in celestial light, / The glory and the freshness of a dream" (658).

## THE CONSUMMATE *AUTEUR*

Ray's wide-ranging interests as a filmmaker, evinced subsequent to the Apu trilogy, seem to be derived from the wide-ranging interests of his family as a whole. (His grandfather, Upendrakishore Ray, had himself been a writer, artist, musician, and publisher who owned his own printing firm; and Ray's mother, Suprabha Das, was a noted amateur singer.) In any event, Ray's broad interests were matched by his multiple capabilities as a director. Scripting, casting, directing, music-scoring, camera-operating, working closely on art direction (including sets and costumes) and editing, even designing his own credit titles and publicity material—Ray did it all, and he did so almost from the start of his career. As a result, his films come as close to wholly personal expression as may be possible in mainstream, or traditionally narrative, cinema.

Within that mainstream (but outside the avant-garde), moreover, there was probably no moviemaker who exercised such total control over his work as Satyajit Ray. Not because he had to, but because he wanted to do so. "I make films for the love of it," he once said, "and I enjoy every moment of the filmmaking process, from the first draft of the scenario to the final cut" (Wakeman, 852). This enthusiasm was evidently communicated to his collaborators, none of whom ever accused him of being dictatorial (as opposed to authorial) on the set, and all of whom have paid tribute over the years to his patience, courtesy, and unfailingly good temper in the face of the many setbacks and even disasters inherent in the process of making movies.

Actors, in particular, were quick to praise Ray, for they received exceptionally skilled and sympathetic direction from him, whether they were professionals, nonprofessionals (amateurs), or, as he put it, "non-actors"—people who had never

acted before and might never act again. Saeed Jaffrey, who played a major role in *The Chess Players*, once bracketed Ray with John Huston as "a gardener director, one who has selected the flowers, knows exactly how much light and sun and water the flowers need, and then lets them grow" (Cardullo, 161). This is precisely what occurred in *The World of Apu*, where Ray drew acting of remarkable depth and conviction from Soumitra Chatterjee and Sharmila Tagore, neither of whom had appeared on screen before. (Tagore, enchantingly beautiful as Aparna, was only fourteen at the time.) They both went on to become major movie stars, as well as regular performers in such Ray films as *The Goddess, The Lonely Wife, The Hero* (1966), *Days and Nights in the Forest*, and *Company Limited* (1971).

## HUMANISM VS. POLITICS

Ray's sensitive work with actors is part and parcel of his filmic work as a whole, which has been characterized as humanistic cinema comparable to that of Jean Renoir (who, during his 1949 visit to Calcutta, encouraged Ray's filmmaking ambition) and Vittorio De Sica (whose *Bicycle Thieves* [1948] influenced Ray, in his words, to "make *Pather Panchali* in the same way, using natural locations and unknown actors" [Sweet, 467]). Still, the reception of Satyajit Ray's films remains divided—not, as with some outstanding directors, between a serious and a popular public because there is no popular public for Ray, but among the serious public. There is the group (of which I count myself a member) that considers him a masterful humanist poet who faltered only when he allowed explicitly ethical questions to cloud his aesthetic sensibility. Then there is another group—mostly of the advance guard—which thinks of Ray as a well-meaning but clumsy and even banal ethnographer, dependent on antique film concepts (such as the idea that one's style should grow out of the material being filmed, that cinematic technique should be solely a means to a higher thematic end) and making what François Truffaut once called UNESCO cinema, or the cinema of India-for-Europeans.

Allegations about the "un-Indianness" of Ray's films often seemed to stem mainly from their wide appeal to foreign audiences—an argument almost never used to adduce a lack of national character in the films of, say, Fellini or Bergman. Ray himself consistently rebutted such attacks during his lifetime by declaring that "all my films are made with my own Bengali audience in view," (Wakeman, 844), and by pointing out that even the most sympathetic Western viewer, unless extraordinarily well-versed in Bengali language, history, and culture, would find much in his cinema alien and incomprehensible. There was another group of critics to which Ray had to respond, however—the one that charged him with a lack of political commitment. Indeed, Chidananda Das Gupta wrote in the British journal *Sight and Sound* (Winter 1966–67) that "the Calcutta of burning trams, communal riots, refugees, unemployment, rising prices, and food shortages, does not exist in Ray's films" (Biswas, 3). Although Ray lived in this major city, according to Das Gupta, there was no correspondence between the poetic humanism of his films and the "poetry of anguish" that had dominated the Calcutta-centered literature of Bengal for the previous ten years.

In comparison with the overtly Marxist anger of the filmmaker Mrinal Sen or the splintering political intensity of the director Ritwik Ghatak (both of them fellow Bengalis), then, Ray had come to seem a remote, Olympian figure, fastidiously withdrawing from present-day turmoil into the safe enclave of the Tagorean past—or even into juvenile fantasy with a picture like *The Adventures of Goopy and Bagha*. In response to his critics, Ray repeatedly retorted that he was in fact committed: "to life, to human beings, to anything that interests me deeply" (Robinson, *Inner Eye*, 333). Yet, though his political sympathies had always lain with the left, he steadfastly refused to give allegiance to any one party, movement, or leader. As he put the matter, "I have deliberately not used political issues as such in my films because I have always felt that in India politics is a very impermanent thing…I still believe in the individual person rather than in a broad ideology which keeps changing all the time" (Wakeman, 847). Such a statement notwithstanding, Ray's films from 1970 on—*The Adversary*, *Company Limited*, and *The Middleman* among them—increasingly confronted political themes amid the turbulent streets of modern-day Calcutta.

Ultimately, debates over either the political commitment or the "Indianness" of Ray's films are irresolvable and probably irrelevant, since (a) he never claimed to speak for all India but only for his vision of it; and (b) as he himself pointed out a number of times,

> I don't think a film is capable of bringing about socio-economic change. No film, or for that matter any work of art, has ever brought about such change. That is not my intention, in any event. I want to present certain problems in my own way—problems that may cause the *characters* to change—and help people to understand them, so that they can do their own thinking. And if *that* brings about social or political change, well…(Cardullo, xiii)

## FILM AND INTERIORITY

Indeed, there is great depth as well as great subtlety to Ray's cinematic probing of human character, and thus of human relationships. So much, in fact, that there is probably no director in film history who—without being dependent on words—has expressed what is going on inside a character's head or heart more acutely than Satyajit Ray. He himself believed that the quintessence of cinema is just that: its ability to capture and communicate the intimacies of the human mind, to explore interiority through, for example, the voice and the voice-over, the close-up, and through film's capacity to present such multiple states of consciousness as present awareness, memory, dream, and daydream.

Ray's interest in employing cinematic devices to reveal the thoughts and feelings of his characters began early in his filmmaking career. From the first, he devised his own strategy for rendering the inner life of a human being: simplify the surface action of any film so that the viewer's attention will direct itself (1) to the reactions of people to one another, or to their environment; (2) to natural scenery and objects and the mood they express; (3) to music as a clue to the state of mind or emotion of a character. None of

this is either dainty aestheticism or tedious documentation on Ray's part; it is an ingrained aspect of his ethos, of a belief in more than one kind of reality.

Thus in the Apu trilogy, the camera often stays with one of two characters after the other has exited the frame, in order to reveal the first character's unspoken response to what has just occurred. Or the camera remains on two silent characters, as in the train sequence of *Pather Panchali*, where the humming telegraph wires hold Apu and Durga in their spell. And when the impoverished wife in the same film receives a postcard bearing good news from her husband, the scene dissolves to water striders dancing on a pond, as a natural correlative to the woman's sudden, ephemeral joy. As for music, though for his first six films Ray commissioned scores from India's best classical musicians—Ravi Shankar, Vilayat Khan, and Ali Akbar Khan—starting with *Three Daughters* he wrote his own music so as to be able to intimate, even more "quietly" than the professional composers, the subjective experience of his characters.

Like Renoir, Ray the director looked, and looked, and looked again, at the same time that he ever listened, building his films through painstaking observation and assisting his players to act with that suggestion of unforced naturalism which looks spontaneous, but is actually the result of hours upon hours of the most concentrated patience. This patience, it could be said, is part of the philosophical outlook underlying Ray's work, which is traditionally Indian in the best sense: it finds joy in life; it accepts death with grace; it arises from a knowledge that combines detachment, or freedom from fear and anxiety, with compassion. Such a philosophy made it possible for Ray the film artist not only to perceive the wider arc of reality, but also to gird the largeness or sweep of that arc with a fineness of detail which in the end can only be described as luminous.

## RENAISSANCE MAN, BENGALI ARTIST

For Ray, then (as for his predecessors during the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Bengali Renaissance in art, culture, and letters), the creation of a work of art was a means of allowing the universal to spring from the particular, of both rediscovering his own Indian heritage and implicitly connecting that heritage to all humanity—aptly, through technical means and conceptual tools acquired from contact with Western culture. By doing so, he succeeded in making Indian cinema, for the first time in its history, something to be taken seriously. At the same time, Ray presented younger Indian filmmakers such as Shyam Benegal, M. S. Sathyu, and G. Aravindan, as well as Kumar Shahani, Mani Kaul, and Adoor Gopalakrishnan, with an unprecedented opportunity to make worthwhile pictures, which they did, like their master, by revealing the working of larger political and cultural forces in the smallest of domestic settings or circumstances.

In the end, Ray himself created a body of work that, for richness and scope, will stand comparison with that of any other film director: indeed, of any artist in any medium. Through the years, whatever the many ebbs and flows of film integrity, Ray was off there in Calcutta working—succeeding, sometimes succeeding less, but always living courageously in art. Although he had offers from Hollywood and elsewhere, his persistence at his own work was not the noble resistance of temptation,

not a matter of not selling out. It was the highest form of self-indulgence: he did what he wanted to do. And the films Ray did, at their best—in *The Lonely Wife*, *Days and Nights in the Forest*, *The Middleman*—move to their own inner rhythm, highly personal yet wholly satisfying, full of warmth, humor, wisdom, empathy, and always the sense that the viewer is on the verge of rousing discovery.

Something similar can be said about his many interviews, which reveal a genial, generous man who, for all his fame, remained to the end amusedly indifferent to movie-world glamour—if not to the reception, and perception, of his own movies. Objective enough about himself to declare, "I have not often been praised or blamed for the right reasons," he was also sufficiently self-regarding to exclaim, "I am a filmmaker, not just a film director. *Auteur!*" (Wakeman, 852)—seemingly in rebuke of those French New Wave critics and directors, like Truffaut, who first promoted the *auteur* theory in the 1950s yet kept a studious distance from someone so "colonial" and "retrograde" as Satyajit Ray. (Nowadays, however, France shows his films more than any other country, and the French actor Gérard Depardieu, who once described Ray's development and counterpointing of themes as Mozartian, was the chief producer of *Branches of the Tree*.)

Nonetheless, the overwhelming impression I took away from a meeting with Ray in 1989 was of a modest, welcoming, contented man who lived happily with his family in a rambling 1920s apartment in North Calcutta, where he typed his own scripts and answered his own phone (and where aspiring actors dropped in at all hours without an appointment). Tall, relaxed, and austerely handsome, Ray didn't seem anything like a "foreign" presence to me on the summer morning of our conversation—indeed, I was the foreigner in this situation, though I was never made to feel like one. This, then, was an artist genuinely at home in both East and West, in his films as in his life.

"I never had the feeling of grappling with an alien culture when reading European literature, or looking at European painting, or listening to Western music, whether classical or popular" (Robinson, *Inner Eye*, 10), Ray told an interviewer ten years before his death. And consider the fact that he was familiar not only with the works of the European artistic giants, but also with the completely different tradition of Indian classical—as well as popular—literature, art, and music. He even knew Bollywood movies quite well and admired some of this cinema's singers and stars (so much so that he recruited a few of the latter to act in his own films) despite its trite, even trashy, stories. Truly, Satyajit Ray was a Renaissance man—Bengali or otherwise.

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## FILMOGRAPHY: KEY FILMS OF POSTWAR GLOBAL NEOREALISM FEATURING CHILDREN

*Somewhere in Europe* (1948), directed by Géza von Radványi

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*Forbidden Games* (1952), directed by René Clément

*Pather Panchali* (1955), directed by Satyajit Ray

*Sundays and Cybèle* (1962), directed by Serge Bourguignon

*Ivan's Childhood* (1962), directed by Andrei Tarkovsky

*Barren Lives* (1963), directed by Nelson Pereira Dos Santos

*Hugo and Josephine* (1967), directed by Kjell Grede

*Naked Childhood* (1968), directed by Maurice Pialat

*Boy* (1969), directed by Nagisa Oshima

*Hoa-Binh* (1970), directed by Raoul Coutard

*Muddy River* (1981), directed by Kobei Oguri

*Pixote* (1981), directed by Hector Babenco

*Little Ida* (1981), directed by Laila Mikkelsen

*The Case Is Closed* (1982), directed by Mrinal Sen

*God's Gift* (1982), directed by Gaston Kaboré

*Sugar Cane Alley* (1983), directed by Euzhan Palcy

*A Summer at Grandpa's* (1984), directed by Hou Hsiao-Hsien

*When Father Was Away on Business* (1985), directed by Emir Kusturica

*Where Is the Friend's House?* (1987), directed by Abbas Kiarostami

*Salaam Bombay!* (1988), directed by Mira Nair

*Freeze. Die. Come to Life* (1989), directed by Vitali Kanevsky

*Yaaba* (1989), directed by Idrissa Ouédraogo

*The Abadanis* (1993), directed by Kianoush Ayari

*The White Balloon* (1995), directed by Jafar Panahi

*The Children of Heaven* (1997), directed by Majid Majidi

*The Mirror* (1997), directed by Jafar Panahi

*The Apple* (1998), directed by Samira Makhmalbaf

*The Color of Paradise* (1999), Majid Majidi

*Ratcatcher* (1999), directed by Lynne Ramsay

*It All Starts Today* (1999), directed by Bertrand Tavernier

*Abouna* (2002), directed by Mahamat-Saleh Haroun

*Osama* (2003), directed by Siddiq Barmak

*Nobody Knows* (2004), directed by Hirokazu Kore-eda

*Turtles Can Fly* (2004), directed by Bahman Ghobadi

*The Italian* (2005), directed by Andrei Kravchuk

## Michelangelo Antonioni's *La notte* / Ingmar Bergman's *Winter Light*



They might have smiled. Averse as they were to plot mechanics in their work, they might have been amused at the blatant coincidence of their deaths on the same day. Or they might have been amused at those who believe it was planned by a cosmic trickster. In any case, July 30, 2007, is now a signal date in film history. Michelangelo Antonioni was ninety-four, Ingmar Bergman was eighty-nine.

Their work now moves into a different light. To wit: almost all the art that is valuable to us is encased in history; it comes to us from the past, recent or remote. These two men, however, were contemporaries of ours. Still, now their art moves into history. In Godard's *Breathless* (1960) the matter is well put. A novelist is asked his ambition. He says: "To become immortal and then to die." Exactly so here, twice. The proximate deaths of Antonioni and Bergman prompt something that was rare during their lives: comparison with each other. What fundamentally links Antonioni and Bergman, despite their differences, is a common theme: the question of God. Do we live in a godless universe? If this is so, how do we go about living? How do we make our choices? A generalization about these two artists is possible. For Bergman, the son of a clergyman who in a sense harassed him all his life, the question pressed constantly. For Antonioni, the question was answered early on, thoroughly, finally. Most of his films are about the result of this vacancy—the murkiness of compass points.

Bergman confronts the basic question intensely in his "faith" trilogy of *Through a Glass Darkly* (1961), *Winter Light* (1962), and *The Silence* (1963), after introducing it in *The Seventh Seal* (1957) and *The Virgin Spring* (1960). We now live in a secular, narcissistic, even hedonistic age, unlike the age—half a century past—during which *Winter Light*, my subject here, was made. This is not to say that something like *Winter Light* couldn't be made now. We are dealing in this case with the rule and not the exception, the middle, not the extremities. Obviously, none of this is intended to denigrate Bergman's film as a mediocrity, or *a priori* to privilege contemporary films over it. Still, "men / Are as the time is" (V.iii.31–32), as Edmund declares in *King Lear* (1606), and no artist in any medium—particularly one so popular, or immediate, as the cinema—can claim exemption.

The centerpiece of Bergman's "faith" trilogy, *Winter Light* is a drama about a clergyman whose faith is shaken but who is, so to speak, trapped in his religious office and continues in it doggedly, yet almost gratefully. *Winter Light* takes place on what used to be a day of rest and devotion—the Sabbath, in this case during the rigorous time span of just a few hours on a wintry Sunday in a rural clergyman's life between matins and vespers, or from morning Communion in one church to the start of an afternoon service at another close by. The middle entry in the trilogy, *Winter Light* suffers far less from the defect of the other two parts, *Through a Glass Darkly* and *The Silence*: such an excess of symbolism that each picture breaks down into a series of discernible metaphors for spiritual alienation rather than an aggregation of those metaphors into an organic, affecting work. (Those who know *Through a Glass*

*Darkly* will note the scornful dismissal by *Winter Light*'s organist of the earlier work's conclusion: "God is love; love is God.")

Though, apart from its literary-like piling up of symbols, *Through a Glass Darkly* relied on almost none of the arty legerdemain that marred *The Magician* (1958) and *The Seventh Seal*, *Winter Light* is even starker and more circumscribed. So much so that this film, somewhat more than the one that immediately followed it, makes one feel that the (ir)religious vision Bergman had been formulating in all his major pictures up to now has finally shed its excrescences and become as simple and direct, as pure and honest, as it is possible to be.

"In 1959," Bergman told then-apprentice Vilgot Sjöman during the production of *Winter Light*, "my wife [the Estonian pianist Käbi Laretei] and I went to say hello to the pastor who had married us. On the way, in the village shop, we saw his wife talking very seriously to a schoolgirl. When we reached the vicarage, the pastor told us that this little girl's father had just committed suicide. The pastor had had several conversations with him earlier, but to no avail" (Sjöman, *Ingmar Bergman Makes a Movie*). From such a small incident Bergman weaves the texture of his tale, in which one man's suicide induces a spiritual crisis for the local pastor and his mistress.

While preparing *Winter Light*, Bergman visited several churches in Uppland (just north of Stockholm) and sat for an hour or two in each one, seeking inspiration for the close of the film. One Sunday, he asked his father to accompany him. As they waited for a Communion service to begin on a chilly spring morning in one particular small church, the pastor declared that he was ill and could not preside over a full service. Bergman's father hurried out to the vestry, and soon afterwards the Communion began, with Pastor Erik Bergman assisting his sick colleague. "Thus," recalls the director in his autobiography, "I was given the end of *Winter Light* and the codification of a rule I have always followed and was to follow from then on: *Irrespective of everything, you will hold your Communion*. It is important to the churchgoer, but even more important to you" (Bergman, 1988: 273).

*Winter Light* is only eighty-one minutes in length compared to the ninety-one of *Through a Glass Darkly* and the ninety-six minutes of *The Silence*; and it uses relatively few actors and settings, like those "chamber" works. But they at least have musical scores (in both cases by Bach), whereas the only music in *Winter Light* occurs during church services in accompaniment to Swedish psalms. Such economy of means, of course, is a matter of great artistry, of artistic *refinement.* And no filmmaker, not even Antonioni, was ever Bergman's superior when it came to knowing what to leave out (one can almost divide true cinematic artists from mere moviemakers on the question of such exclusion)—the absences in *Winter Light* being as significant as what is presented. They in fact contribute in the most central way to the picture's theme, as well as to its visual architecture, since Bergman is dealing here with an image of spiritual darkness and desolation, with an "absence" in the soul.

That absence is a crisis in, almost a loss of, faith, and it is a middle-aged Lutheran minister named Tomas Ericsson who is in its grip. To describe his condition in this way is entirely accurate, for his anguish is experienced like a violent seizure, the "silence of God" being a palpable thing. Since the season is winter, the days are short and the light is sparse and sterile—a counterpart to the weather, the climate as well as

the illumination, in the pastor's soul. The planes and angles of the camera's investigations (black-and-white cinematography by Sven Nykvist) mark out this universe of gray emptiness within a framework that makes it even more austere or stringent. And the "gray area" here, the study in varying shades of gray, is entirely appropriate, because the clergyman's crisis is a continuing one; nothing is resolved either for or against religious belief. In a different film, a different life, we would abide in the expectation of answers; in *Winter Light*, we can only take heart from a continuity of questions.

The minister is accompanied, in his clerical vocation, by a schoolteacher, Märta Lundberg, who loves him and wants to marry and whose presence he accepts—but whom he cannot love in return and whom he rejects as they sit together in her deserted schoolroom. For it develops that when Tomas's wife died some years before, his capacity to love died with her, and it becomes clear that for him such a loss is itself a demonstration of God's absence or indifference. Tomas is a pitiful, cowardly figure, then, because he cannot choose between a worldly love (offered to him by the forlorn, ailing Märta) and the unattainable ideal implied in the religious dogma he intones before the altar. Thus does Bergman, in the most delicate, unrhetorical, yet profoundly moving way, link the realms of natural and supernatural, diurnal and supernal love, keeping the tension between them at a high pitch and never resorting to cheap or arbitrary solutions. For him life's special agony is just such a rending of the loving bond between God and man. Unlike Antonioni in his work on this subject, Bergman does not believe that man invented God but now must be manly enough to admit it and destroy him. The Swedish director is concerned to find a way of living with—at the very least—the memory of God, and the only way to such divinity is through affinity: if not the loving marriage between two human beings, then fellow-feeling of the kind that is contained in the very idea of "ministration."

Or so this Lutheran minister learns. One of his parishioners, a fisherman by the name of Jonas Persson—with three children and a pregnant wife—is in a state of depression, deepened by the immanence in the world of nuclear-bomb threats. Brought by his wife, the anxious fisherman talks to the pastor in the vestry after morning service—and the pastor's own spiritual bankruptcy is glaringly revealed in their talk. In baring his own misgivings, in lamenting his own situation rather than comprehending the fisherman's, the doubting Tomas depresses the man further and propels him toward suicide. The pastor even admits to Jonas that he does not himself believe in God's existence; when his unfortunate parishioner has left the church, he then turns to Märta and says, with shocking complacency, "Now I'm free." Later comes word that the fisherman has committed suicide, which brings the minister face to face with the truth that his own worst suffering—as well as that of his flock—is caused by his inability to fulfill his vocation.

But through the instrumentality of another character, a hunchbacked sexton called Algot Frövik—who possesses a wry, mordant yet exceptionally deep commitment to faith—Tomas is shown the glint of possibility, of light whose very promise or idea is contained in this picture's title. That glinting possibility consists in going on, in living through the aridity and absence, in making continual acts of faith precisely where faith is most difficult or even repellent. The film ends at twilight with the pastor

beginning the vespers service (even as *Winter Light* began with a Communion service), in nearby Frostnäs Church with only one or two parishioners in attendance. On the one hand, this clergyman is slipping back almost desperately into clerical routine. (Indeed, before the service at this church, it becomes clear through a superb bit of dialogue with his sexton that Tomas resembles the disciples who understood nothing during their three years in the company of Jesus, and who deserted him in his hour of need.) On the other hand, he continues to minister to the faithful, and the darkness of winter night has not yet come.

This summary fails to do justice to the mastery Bergman revealed over his materials in *Winter Light*. For one thing, his actors—Max von Sydow as the fisherman, Ingrid Thulin as the teacher, Gunnar Björnstrand as the pastor—could not be bettered. They had by this time become the perfect instruments of Bergman's directorial will, forming what was undoubtedly the finest cinematic acting company in the world, one that the stage (where Bergman began and, to some extent, remained) might still envy, or envy even more, today. Here, as elsewhere in the "faith" trilogy, their work was especially difficult, for they had to give human gravity to a stripped-down exercise in God-famished theology.

To single out only one example from her performance, Ingrid Thulin succeeds in her reading of Märta's letter to Tomas to an extraordinary degree; her face seems to project every nuance of the words she is reciting and to express her sentiments with a frankness beyond the reach of the evasive, shifty-eyed Tomas. Not for nothing does the film title translate from the Swedish as *The Communicants*. For Bergman, here, as so often elsewhere, the irony of life is people's failure to communicate with one another. When Tomas arrives at the riverside to attend Jonas's corpse, for instance, the incessant boom of the nearby rapids tellingly drowns out the conversation between the police and the pastor, as well as seeming to blur the latter's emotional response.

There are other subtleties, too. Tomas and his churchwardens address each other in the third person, emphasizing the distance between them as well as the hierarchical structure of orthodox religion. And in the opening sequence, the camera scrutinizes each churchgoer in close-up, then from afar as they shuffle up to the altar rail for Communion; they appear frail, almost disjointed, like puppets on a string, and in desperate need of comfort. As the worshippers kneel before the altar for Communion, they might as well be accepting medicine from a doctor as bread and wine from the priest. (Later in the film, Märta offers Tomas aspirin and cough medicine in much the same way.)

The film's effect depends on the penetration *in us*, finally, of the worshippers' desperation and the minister's doubt, as well as the teacher's hopeless love and the fisherman's boundless despair (which are all meant to reflect, in their way, on the central problem of religious belief). The spiritual problem is not merely stated in *Winter Light*, as some commentators continue to assert; it *is* visualized or externalized, as I described earlier. Still, to deal in physical film terms with the complex metaphysical question of the existence of God, and the equally difficult-to-sustain phenomenon of human isolation or alienation, requires performances of a freshening, even frightening kind. And Bergman got them in *Winter Light*, to create a solemn, spare, severe artwork that is nonetheless full of strange, harsh beauty.

Another requirement of an authentic spiritual style is that it be grounded in naturalistic simplicity, even abstraction—as *Winter Light* is—not in widescreen pyrotechnics of the kind found in such contemporaneous sand-and-sandals epics as *Quo Vadis?* (1951), *Ben Hur* (1959), *King of Kings* (1961), and *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (1965). The spirit resides within, in internal conviction, not in external trickery. Everything that is exterior, ornamental, liturgical, hagiographic, and miraculous in the universal doctrine and everyday practice of Catholicism (as opposed to Bergman's unaccommodated Lutheranism) does indeed show affinities with the cinema—conceived, with its spectacular iconography, as a kind of miracle in itself akin to the miracle of the Sacrament or the saints. But these affinities, which have made for the commercial success of countless movies, are also the source of the religious insignificance of most of them.

Almost everything that is good in the domain of religious film, then, was created not by the exploitation of the patent consanguinity of Catholicism with the cinema, but rather by working against it: by the psychological and moral deepening of the spiritual factor as well as by the renunciation of the physical representation either of the supernatural or of God's grace. In other words, although the austereness of the Protestant sensibility is not indispensable to the making of a good Catholic motion picture, it can nevertheless be a real advantage, as evidenced by films such as Robert Bresson's *Diary of a Country Priest* (1951) and *The Trial of Joan of Arc* (1962) as well as Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Gospel According to St. Matthew* (1964). As for the thing-in-itself, good Protestant cinema, you have Bergman's "faith" trilogy and the picture of his that directly preceded it, *The Virgin Spring*, in addition to such films of his fellow Scandinavian Carl Dreyer as *Day of Wrath* (1943) and *The Word* (1955).

My reservations about the secularity and hedonism of our own age, as opposed to the one that produced these "faith" films, are those of an aging critic who sees an increasing number of "faithless" movies coming along, yet who continues to hope (if not believe) that there is more to love than lust, that the spirit is greater in importance than the body, and that romance has as much to do with religious rapture as with sexual transport. For all their white heat, in other words, the giddy fantasy of most romantic movies (let alone porno pictures) leaves me alone in earthbound darkness, coolly and contractively contemplating the state of my own connubial bond. Whereas the sober mystery of *Winter Light* may have left me ice-cold, but it is glistening cold that seeks out the expansive warmth of divine solace (a solace that disappeared from so much of Bergman's work subsequent to this film). And everything that so rises, naturally, must converge.

Michelangelo Antonioni himself never deals extensively with religion in his films. (Elsewhere, in interviews and articles, he was explicit.) But his view of it underlies very much of his work, his sense that religion is a function of the past, now outworn. As he knew, for Western society itself, theistically based and teleologically organized, the concepts of drama that derived substantially from Aristotle had sufficed for centuries. The cinema was born to that inheritance and, out of it, still produced fine works in the 1960s (although with a perceptibly increasing tinge of nostalgia that has, by the twenty-first century, become overwhelmingly palpable). But Antonioni saw the dwindling force of this inheritance—"of an aging morality, of

outworn myths, of ancient conventions," as he put it in a statement accompanying the initial screening of *L'avventura* at the 1960 Cannes Film Festival—and was finding new means to supplement it. He was achieving, in other words, what many contemporary artists in his and other fields were seeking but not often with success: renewal of his art rather than repetition.

It is a commonplace that the most difficult part of an artist's life in our time is not to achieve a few good works or some recognition, but to have a career, as Antonioni (and Bergman) did: to live a life *in* art, all through one's life, at the same time as one replenishes the life *of* that art. But since the beginning of the romantic era and the rise of subjectivism, the use of synthesis—of selecting from both observation and direct experience, then imaginatively rearranging the results—has declined among serious artists, until by the 1960s art had taken on some aspects of talented diary-keeping. (The most obvious examples from the period are "confessional" poetry and "action" painting.) An artist's life and internal experience have thus become more and more circumscribedly his subject matter, and his willingness to stay within them has become almost a touchstone of his validity. This has led to the familiar phenomenon of the quick depletion of resources—all those interesting first and second works, and then the sad, straggling works that follow them—not to speak of the debilitation of art. The question is further complicated because the more sensitive a person is, the more affected he is in our time by Ibsen's Great Boyg—that shapeless, grim, and unconquerable monster from *Peer Gynt* (1867) who represents the riddle of existence—which increases the artist's sense of helplessness, of inability to deal with such experience as he does have.

One such response from the 1960s—the decade during which Antonioni made his great trilogy, which includes *L'avventura* (1960), *La notte* (1961), and *L'eclisse* (1962)—was that of Jackson Pollock, Hans Hofmann, and their kin, who were exponents of dissatisfaction rather than re-creation. Another was that of French anti-novelists like Alain Robbe-Grillet and Nathalie Sarraute, who, in their frustration with the limits of the conventional novel, asked readers to share their professional problems rather than be affected as readers. Bertolt Brecht, for his part, jostled the traditional drama healthily (ironically, more so subsequent to his death in 1956 than prior to it), but his theater was didactic and aimed towards a different godhead—a temporal one that now seems sterile to many. The so-called Theater of the Absurd faced reality rigorously and even poetically, but such a theater of images and few or no characters was limited to disembodied effects—and each of its playwrights (Ionesco, Beckett, Pinter) seemed to have one reiterated effect.

In films, too, the avant-garde—Man Ray, Jean Cocteau, and many others to follow—had tried to find new methods or forms; but they, too, concentrated so much on the attempt that they neglected to communicate much content. A more conventional artist like Ingmar Bergman felt the spiritual discontent of the 1960s as keenly as anyone, but his films from this period, for all their superb qualities, could be said to exemplify Buck Mulligan's line to Stephen Dedalus in James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922): "You have the cursed jesuit strain in you, only it's injected the wrong way" (Ch. 1, line 209). The fountainhead of these Bergman films, that is, may be mysticism, but his asking whether the God-man relation was still viable seemed

anachronistic—to put it mildly—by the second half of the twentieth century. Antonioni himself seemed, around the same time, to have answered that question in the negative; to have posited that human beings must learn self-reliance or crumble; to have begun hoping for the possibility of hope.

Nonetheless, Antonioni seemed to be forging a miracle, albeit of the secular kind: finding a way to speak to his contemporaries without crankily throwing away all that went before and without being bound by it. He was re-shaping the idea of the content of film drama by discarding ancient and less ancient concepts, by re-directing traditional audience expectations towards immersion in character rather than conflict of character, away from the social realism of his neorealist forbears and toward what can be called "introspective realism"—in order to see just what remained inside the individual after the nightmare of World War II (with its Holocaust and atomic weaponry) and all the political as well as economic upheavals that followed. Particularly in the trilogy but also in the film immediately following it (and his first one in color), *Red Desert* (1964), Antonioni arrived—without inventing a totally new *language* of cinema—at a new and profoundly cinematic mode of expression or exposition, in which every aspect of style, of the purely visual realm of action and object, reflects the interior state of the characters.

Indeed, such films exemplified far more profoundly than any other works of the time the capacity of the screen to be a source of myth in the Artaudian sense. These movies, linked to one another much less by subject than by sensibility and attitude, were creations that told us what we were going to be like next, how we were about to act, and the kind of regard we would have for our actions. At the same time—and as a principle of these forecasts—they delineated the world with a scrupulously accurate sobriety, a refusal to enhance or "dramatize" what lay open to the ordinary eye.

The same cannot be said for films of his from the previous decade like *The Girlfriends* (1955) and *The Outcry* (1957), though it's true that as early as *Story of a Love Affair* (1950) one can discern Antonioni's habit of shooting rather long scenes, in long takes. Antonioni was thus re-shaping not only the idea of the content of film drama, he was also re-shaping time itself in his films: taking it out of its customary synoptic form and wringing intensity out of its distention; daring to ask his audience to "live through" experiences with less distillation than they were accustomed to; deriving his drama from the very texture of such experiences and their juxtaposition, rather than from formal clash, climax, and resolution. Fundamentally, he was giving us characters whose drama consists in facing life minute after minute rather than in moving through organized, cause-and-effect plots with articulated obstacles—characters who have no well-marked cosmos to use as a tennis player uses a court, and who live and die without the implication of a divine eye that sees their virtues (whether people do or not) and will reward them.

Over such characters, Antonioni ever hovered with his camera: peering, following, and then lingering to savor a place after the people have left it. Again, he was more interested in personality, mood, and the physical world than in drama, in setting as a way of expressing states of mind—so much so that in *Red Desert*, he even had the natural surroundings painted to serve the film's underlying psychological scheme as well as to connote the seemingly metaphysical world of its characters. He

was interested more in the observation of characters than in the exigencies of storytelling. And it is this interest—if we apply conventional cinematic standards—that at times makes his pictures, with their elliptical approach to narrative, seem to have lost their way.

For Antonioni was trying to exploit the unique powers of film as distinct from the theater. Many superb film directors (like his countryman Vittorio De Sica, and like Bergman) were oriented theatrically; Antonioni was not. He attempted to get from the cinema the same utility of the medium itself as a novelist whose point is not story but tone and character, and for whom the texture of the prose works as much as what he says in the prose. In this way, Antonioni's movies, like other great works of film art, can be seen as sharing in the flexibility and potential subtlety of imaginative prose, which stems from the very abstractness of words, their not being "real" objects—just as film, being made of reflections cast on a screen, is not "real" either. (It ought not to be necessary to say here that this resemblance between film and the novel is of an intellectual and aesthetic kind and not a physical, merely formal one. Movies are obviously not filmed literary statements, but instead creations obeying their own principles and accomplishing their own special, visual effectiveness.)

In fact, by purely *theatrical* standards, any of Antonioni's major feature films could easily be condensed by a skilled cutter. *La notte*, of course, is no exception to this rule. Here Antonioni leads us untheatrically into the city, into concrete walls and reflections in glass, after the rocks, great spaces, sea, and terraces of *L'avventura*. And here the search, or the movement, comes to the same end as that film, or a fractional distance beyond. The acceptance is made of what we are; it is impossible not to accept such a conclusion as this film dies out on its couple shatteringly united in the dust, because everything we are not, but which we have found no other means of shedding, has been stripped away. *La notte*, then, is composed according to the same principle of narrative indeterminacy as its predecessor—the same refusal to tell an easily repeatable, anecdotal "story"—and of course it proceeds from the same kind of insight into contemporary moral or psychic dilemmas. The relationship between the insight and its expression is crucial, and I will return to it, but at this point I want to discuss the sequence that, in my view, best represents Antonioni's style: the one from *La notte* in which Lidia (Jeanne Moreau), the wife of the novelist Giovanni (Marcello Mastroianni), slips away from the publisher's party and wanders through the streets of Milan.

Conditioned as we are, we *expect* something to happen during this sequence; we think that Lidia is off to meet a lover, or that she may get involved in an accident, even that she may intend to kill herself. But nothing happens, and everything happens. Lidia strolls past a bus conductor eating a sandwich and is fascinated both by his existence and his appetite in the same universe with her; she passes two men laughing uproariously at a joke and she smiles, too, although she has not heard it, anxious as she is to join them, to be one of the human race; she encounters a crying child and kneels briefly but unsuccessfully to comfort it; she tears a flake of rust off a corroding wall; she sees two young men punching each other ferociously, watches horrified, then screams for them to stop. Next, in the suburbs, Lidia watches some boys

shooting off rockets. She finds that she is in a neighborhood where she and Giovanni used to come years before, so she telephones him and he drives out to pick her up.

Certainly by film-school definition, this is not a cumulative dramatic sequence. It is a miniature recapitulation, deftly done, of the possibilities of life: there is a child but there is also an old woman; we see a man eating and a man punching; sunlight on a fountain gets juxtaposed, at one point, against the lewdness of a greasy stall-keeper. Antonioni holds it all together with something like the surface tension of liquids and, by not commenting, comments. His art is essentially as drastic a revolution as abstract expressionist painting or Samuel Beckett's litany-like deconstruction of dialogue, but Antonioni has not alienated us in order to speak to us about loneliness, and he has not sacrificed the link of recognition in order to create new images. Put another way, he has not had to use absurdity to convey the absurd—an absurd made manifest in our age by the crisis of faith, for which, in *La notte* Lidia and Giovanni's vitiated marriage itself serves as one large metaphor.

The action in *La notte* takes place over slightly less than twenty-four hours in the life of this married couple, beginning with their midday hospital visit to a dying friend and ending early the next morning in the sunrise aftermath of a lavish party at which their simmering tensions drive them openly apart. The story of Giovanni, the novelist, and Lidia, his wife of unstated profession, is defined by time, but the time in which it exists is offscreen—the past, the early days of their love and the accretion of their discontent, the time in which he wrote the book for which, in the course of the day, he is repeatedly feted; and the future, the possibility that the couple will overcome their estrangement, will remember what brought them together, will heal their hostility and rediscover their lost love.

It's a strangely self-displacing story, one that's pulled back to the past and catapulted forward into the future. Time itself seems to efface Giovanni and Lidia— which makes the casting of two intensely dramatic stars as the quietly smoldering, tensely involuted, perhaps ex-lovers all the more crucial. Antonioni has Mastroianni and Moreau restrain themselves; he leaves overt theatricality to other characters, whose flamboyant expressivity is more or less the mark of their insubstantiality, insincerity, or frivolity; their brazen self-assertion in the fullness of the moment seems blind and trivial. Giovanni passes through the world with a withholding temperament that presumably feeds a keen and discerning sense of observation but that also results in a peculiar passivity—he goes where he's invited, he yields almost somnolently to seduction in grotesquely inappropriate situations—as a result of which his handsome and finely set features seem as featureless as a mirror. Meanwhile, Lidia, a capable, sensitive, intelligent, and worldly woman, is emptied out by her subordination to Giovanni's existence; her own intellectual life has become merely a reflection of his—a reflection of a reflection.

The drama of *La notte* is offscreen too—the question of whether Lidia and Giovanni still love each other—but Antonioni, rendering characters who are remote from their own emotions and detached from their own existence, severs the link between action and feeling and turns his protagonists into distracted and puzzled spectators of their own gestures. It is as if the drama doesn't pertain to the characters themselves, as if their actions were taking place at a remove from them. Though the

crux of the story is internal, its correlates are less in the things that Giovanni and Lidia do than in the places they go and the milieu they inhabit. Instead of establishing the movie's locations as theaters of action, Antonioni turns them into the frames of abstract forms, which are the real stars of the picture. He films buildings, interior design, and the innumerable incidental objects of daily life as a kind of visual music that is stretched out on staves of time.

In the hospital where Giovanni and Lidia visit their friend Tommaso, shots out the window from different angles slice the cityscape into its past (with weighty and ornate buildings) and its future (a clean-lined, gleaming, abstracted modernism): vast blank surfaces that overwhelm identity, immense glass walls that beguile identity, hypnotically repetitive shapes that chill identity, bare monumental vistas that distance identity, sharp lines that define no distinctions, a shining white staircase that leads inward to nowhere. The city of the living future is thus utterly alien to nature. When Giovanni returns to the couple's pristine modern apartment, in a massive complex, the breeze that lifts the curtains passes through them like an atavistic intruder. The moment offers an uncanny thrill of repressed spirits emerging from the awesome purity of the urban order and the monstrous, inhuman disproportion of its scale.

With understated shifts in perspective here, Antonioni captures a world that is subtly yet deeply out of joint. (In *L'eclisse* and *Red Desert*, the visual dislocation would be even more radical, and the emotional one irreparable.) One sequence in *La notte*, for example, shows Giovanni and Lidia entering his publisher's office for his book party. As he passes behind a rack of his books and pauses for a mortal instant, his name appears repeatedly in front of him like a caption that's empty of meaning, an incantation of nonsense sounds that somehow constitute him and that he's there somehow to impersonate—an anti-verbal opacity that lends its meaninglessness to the little bricks of words that lie beneath these tags and that also reduces to inanity the suited and dressed, coiffed and elegant, witty and eloquent intellectuals who are there to celebrate him and his opaque creation.

I think this verbally stripped and visually bare, yet nonetheless mercilessly "recognizable," quality of Antonioni's films is what was then so new, and what is still so marvelous, about them. The conversations, from any film in Antonioni's trilogy, that fall into a void; the head and shoulders of Moreau, as Lidia, traveling, microscopically, along the angle of a building in *La notte*; the unfilled or unoccupied distances: all adding up to anomie, anguish, abandonment, diminishment, the anticipated event or sighting that never occurs, just as Godot never comes. For Beckett and Antonioni are two artists who enforce our relinquishment of the answer, the solution, the arrival, two creators who dis-illusion us (and, in Antonioni's case, without simultaneously estranging us). The search for reality, and not reality as it appears to be, is thus Antonioni's subject; his discovery is that the real world is lying, is insubstantial and even treacherous, a thoroughgoing accomplice of our lovelessness.

Lovelessness, and the tiny, sorrowing, infinitely vulnerable gestures we try to make to restore the possibility of love—these, too, are Antonioni's subjects; they, too, make up the new reality that he has discovered. *La notte* ends in a scene of almost unbearably painful acceptance: of our having to be what we are, of there being no fiction that will exonerate or console us, no *ending*. The couple of *La notte*, writhing

carnally in the dust on the rich man's lawn, struggle ferociously toward truth, or rather toward truthfulness. They do not love; they may love again; they have at least begun by acknowledging their suffering and their despair.

Clearly, *La notte* is a movie without a traditional subject. (We can only think it is "about" the despair of the idle rich or our ill-fated quest for pleasure if we are intent on making old anecdotes out of new essences: more on this subject later.) Yet it is about nothing we could have known without it, nothing to which we had already attached meanings or surveyed in other ways. It is, without being abstract, about nothing *in particular*, being instead, like most painting of its period, self-contained and absolute, an action and not the description of an action. To paraphrase Beckett on the fiction of James Joyce (in Beckett's "Dante…Bruno. Vico…Joyce," 14), *La notte* is a film *of* something, not "about" something.

It is part of that next step in our feelings that true art is continually eliciting and recording. We had been taking that step for a long time, most clearly in painting, but also in music, in certain areas of fiction, in anti-theatre or meta-theatre (of the kind, still scarce, which, through new parodic languages, breaks with everything moribund or dead in our theater). It might be described as accession through reduction, the coming into truer forms through the cutting away of created encumbrances: all the replicas we have made of ourselves; all the misleading, because logical or only psychological, narratives; the whole apparatus of reflected wisdom, inherited emotions, received ideas, reiterated clichés.

Thematically, as opposed to formally, Antonioni was treating of human connections no longer sustained by traditional values, or by any convictions at all (a humanity with too much freedom of choice, as it were), and therefore forced to abide with the most fragile and precarious of justifications. One might say that his films were the first truly existential ones. When I first saw *La notte* I was filled with a sense of discovery of a world—a visual one this time, not a theoretical, abstract one as in Kierkegaard or Sartre—which no longer replied to the questions I had about it and gave me no feeling of nurture, acceptance, or invitation. And that is the way Antonioni's characters move through their environments, in a new and strange alienation, an individual isolation in the midst of constant social interaction: a condition very different from, and far more subtle than, what is suggested by the clichés of modern sophisticated awareness, all our talk (even more feverish in the twenty-first century) about the failure of communication, technological dehumanization, the death of God, the fragmentation or atomization of society, and the like.

This new alienation—this despair or desolation in spite of the superficial appearance of affluence and pleasure, this emotional barrenness that Antonioni called (in a public appearance at the 1962 Cannes Festival) "the eclipse of all feelings"—is what we might call his subject or theme, but that isn't the same thing as his art and it is a great mistake to think it is. The basis for my argument that Antonioni's films are not "about" a decadent class—let alone the death throes of capitalism—is that the visual world he composes, the one he discovers beneath appearances and calls into being, is the one we all inhabit, whether or not we have been summoned into any of its particular scenes. In *La notte*, this world is the city (Milan), with its geometry of

streets and its assembly of artifacts, the coldest products of modern materialistic "wit" and inventiveness, the new nature. But it is Antonioni's characters that have been given the task of being its explorers—and its exhibited sacrifices.

Coherence, unity, connection between interior self and exterior reality are no longer sustained by this world of commerce and utility, so its inhabitants have to establish for themselves the very ground of their behavior. What is mistaken for boredom in Antonioni's characters, then, is actually a condition of radical disjunction between personality and circumstance. For a vital connection has been broken: the physical world has been dispossessed of the inherited meanings and principles according to which we had previously motivated our lives and structured its psychic as well as moral events. In such a world the idea of a "story," in the sense of a progressive tale leading from a fixed starting point to a dénouement that "settles" something or solves some problem, no longer has any use and is in fact inimical to the way this world is actually experienced.

This is the reason for the broken narratives, the conversations in a void, the events leading nowhere—Moreau's wandering without destination through the city in *La notte*, for example. For a story implies a degree of confidence in the world, or at least a trustfulness that the environment, no matter how painful or brutal it might be, is knowable, makes sense, and hangs together. But of course there is a "story" in Antonioni's films, though not of the traditional kind. Will I be understood if I say that this story is in one sense the tale of the end of the stories with which the screen, along with the novel, has heretofore beguiled us? I mean that our former modes of fiction— the love story, the romantic quest, the action epic—have lost their power of conviction because the world we experience has lost its own such power. The essence of Antonioni's art in *La notte*, as well as the other two films in his trilogy, is therefore to forge, in the face of our lost convictions and acceptances about the world— convictions and acceptances upon which we had based our narrative arts—a new, mercilessly stripped "telling" of our condition of bereftness and chill, one that refuses to find "endings" or resolutions or definitive images that reassure us.

Such abstraction and reduction, like irony and parody, are forms of aggression against the traditional subject, against what art is supposed to treat. They are, much more than direct violence, our most effective means of liberating our experience, of releasing those unnamed emotions and perceptions that have been blockaded by everything we have been taught to see and hear and feel. This blockage is the reason why, despite the fact that Antonioni's films are far from experimental in the sense of the work of Hollis Frampton, Michael Snow, or Andy Warhol, his fictional narratives always feel flattened; or, to borrow a term from Roland Barthes, why they seem curiously *mat*, as if the spectator's ability to gain immediate access to the fiction were being impeded by something. What continues to excite me about the films of Antonioni is the sense they communicate, to one degree or another, of extending the areas of freedom—troubled freedom because a price is paid when you are always half engaged in repudiating your erstwhile captors—which we have gained from the other arts. To recast a line from Shaw's *Major Barbara* (1905), we are also learning something in the act of watching a film by Antonioni, and that always feels at first as if we are losing something.

What we learn from Antonioni's world of alienation and disjunction is exemplified, as I have tried to make clear, not merely by what his characters do and say, but by the images they compose and that are composed as the context for their cinematic existence. "The fundamental problem of the cinema is how to express thought" (20), the great critic and theorist of the French New Wave, Alexandre Astruc, wrote almost seventy years ago. *La notte* is a film in which thought—indissolubly fused with image, lying behind it, selecting it and justifying it—produces an art worthy of ranking with any other. In the entire range of Antonioni's *oeuvre*, of his calculated "boredom" and refusal of clear resolution, we see being fought this tendency of narrative to turn away from "thought" and into an extended anecdote that serves either to legitimate or mythologize actuality, thus making it nothing more than an illustration of what we have already undergone, surmised, or wished for. That Antonioni, in presenting not new stories but new relationships between consciousness and reality, was expected to do otherwise was the very basis of complaint against a film such as *La notte*. This film, however, is a new form of perception about, and artifact of, our continuing dilemmas and contradictions and perplexities—not a representation of them.

The same became true of Ingmar Bergman only in the masterpiece of his that followed *Winter Light*, *Persona* (1966), where, having seemingly rejected all religious belief (and having also become convinced that human life is haunted by a virulent, active evil), he created a work that consists in the thesis that to be conscious of self—as simultaneous authentic being and hollow chimera—yet go on living in a godless universe is to suffer as only a tragic hero can.

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# François Truffaut's *Jules and Jim*



The political uncertainties of postwar France, the Vietnamese and Algerian wars, the growth of ideological disillusion almost into an ideology, a conviction of sterility and vacuum in society and in traditional art: all of these produced the French New Wave, a group of young people who liberated themselves through film in the late 1950s. At bottom less a wave than an epidemic of faith and of desperation—a desperate hope that cinema might prove to be an answer to much that was harassing French society and culture—the New Wave consisted of a group of filmmakers who, in a burst of creative energy, turned out their first feature films between 1958 and 1960. The movement owes its considerable international reputation largely to the work of François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, and Alain Resnais, but these are not the only names to be mentioned in this regard. The richly productive period that began with Claude Chabrol's *Le beau Serge* (1958) witnessed the emergence of a host of talented moviemakers, among them Éric Rohmer, Jacques Rivette, Agnès Varda, Chris Marker, Jean-Pierre Melville, Georges Franju, and Jacques Demy.

With the exception of a few such as Alexandre Astruc, Roger Vadim, and Louis Malle, none of these artists served conventional apprenticeships as assistant directors

or writers in commercial cinema, and it is partly for this reason that their work is remarkably free of the slick, confectionery aspects of pre-World War II French studio products. On the other hand, the majority of these directors *did* spend time making short films or working on documentaries (or both), and this experience frequently lends to their work an air of *cinéma vérité*. Their pictures tend to have a handheld look, a roughness of texture, and a cinematic style influenced by the practical solutions employed in low-budget enterprises: improvisation, inexpensive shooting techniques (through the use of lightweight, easily portable equipment), on-location filming, stories with contemporary settings, and the use of non-professionals or in any case non-stars whenever possible.

The New Wave had its roots in the critical writings of young film enthusiasts who, in the early 1950s, served their theoretical apprenticeship under the guidance of André Bazin, the founder of the journal *Cahiers du cinéma*. Retreating a generation to the 1930s of Jean Renoir and Jean Vigo, where they located the zest and spontaneity of what they considered to be the authentic French tradition, these critics-become-directors rejected "papa's cinema," the old-fashioned, worn-out format of smooth but impersonal, studio-bound filmmaking—ornately staged, heavily plotted, and over-scripted—associated with names like René Clair, Marcel Carné, Max Ophüls, and René Clément. Conversely, they endorsed a free, more individualistic style of shooting independent of the restrictions of established industry practices and featuring, above all, *auteurist* direction. Truffaut himself coined the phrase "politique des auteurs" in *Cahiers du cinéma* in January 1954, and this was a politics or theory holding that the movie director, the equal of artists in other forms, should be the "author" of his work and as such the major creative force behind every one of his cinematic endeavors, displaying a personal stylistic signature visible from film to film.

Such a force was Truffaut, who, like the young Vigo and the young Renoir, built his early work on the central artistic idea of freedom, both in human relationships and film technique. Truffaut's early protagonists, in films such as *The 400 Blows* (1959), *Shoot the Piano Player* (1960), *Jules and Jim* (1962), and *The Wild Child* (1969), were rebels, loners, or misfits who felt stifled by conventional social definitions. And his early cinematic style was as anxious to rip chords as his characters were. Unlike his friend and contemporary Godard, Truffaut went on in his career to consistently commit himself, not to continued experiment in film form or radical critique of visual imagery, but to highly formal themes like art and life, film and fiction, and art and education. He seemed to believe that his commitment to formal aesthetic excellence would eventually serve the political purposes that powerful art always serves, and that to betray his own artistic powers to make programmatic statements would perhaps have led to his making of bad art—and bad statements. Like Renoir, then, Truffaut saw the creation of film art, of any art, as a genuinely humane and socially meaningful response to the potentially chaotic disorder of formless reality.

Let me now consider one of those humane and meaningful artistic responses, *Jules and Jim*. This film is one of the masterpieces of the French New Wave, if not the highest achievement of that movement. In some respects, however, *Jules and Jim* is not a characteristic New Wave film: whereas most New Wave pictures sought to

express the rhythms of their own epoch with complete freshness, Truffaut in this film retreated to the past. Opening brightly in *La Belle Époque* and closing in the grim era of the Depression and the rise of Hitler, *Jules and Jim* chronicles twenty-two years in the lives of its characters. But in its own, telescopic way this 1962 film is faithful to the existentialist ethic and aesthetic of its period, for no New Wave film strives more obviously for authenticity in its quest to tap the feelings of a liberated generation whose morality (particularly in the wake of the Holocaust and French collaboration with the Nazis) had to be achieved on the run.

Based on the 1953 semi-autobiographical novel by Henri-Pierre Roché, *Jules and Jim* combines the celebration of human freedom and sheer joy in filmmaking—each of which characterized the New Wave—with the themes of obsessive, antagonistic love and personal (as opposed to societal) morality. Like the enigmatic, smiling face of the woman sculpted in stone that first transfixes the film's heroes and then initiates their mythic quest, *Jules and Jim* remains an ever-elusive, ever-seductive image of the need to preserve love and friendship—friendship between two men, love *à trois*—against the erosions of time and doubt. Using in medley virtually every resource the medium knows—montage or rapid cutting, panning, full-shot framing, jump cuts, tilting, zoom shots, swish pans, masking shots, close-ups, long shots (at times from a helicopter), handheld camera movement, tracking shots backward and forward, freeze frames, irises, and even, from the silent cinema, a burlesqued title card—Truffaut thus introduces in this picture a theme that reappears throughout his canon: that of the problematic (yet inevitable) form of the couple-relationship and the destructive, potentially tragic conflict that can beset all marriages.

The story begins in 1912 with a rapid montage sequence while the voice-over narrator introduces the viewer to a pair of carefree, carefully contrasted young writer-translators, Jim (Henri Serre, imbued with melting standoffishness), a tall, dark, not-quite-dashing Parisian, and Jules (Oskar Werner, full of pained charm), a rather short, blond, shy Austrian and a stranger to the French capital. "Everyone called them Don Quixote and Sancho Panza," the narrator tells us. When we first meet them, they are living out a genial but somewhat lackluster bohemianism, brimming with talk about writing and women. While viewing slides at the home of an acquaintance, Albert (Boris Bassiak), the two friends become enraptured by the mysterious image of a woman's head carved in stone. They immediately go to visit an open-air museum on a Greek island in the Adriatic, where they can gaze in person at her disdainful yet beautiful smile, which Truffaut presents through a dramatic series of zooms, pans, and tracking shots circling around the stone figure.

Not long after, Jules invites Jim to meet three girls visiting Paris, one of whom bears an uncanny resemblance—reinforced by Truffaut's repetition of the island montage—to the statue. The sculpture-come-to-life is Catherine (Jeanne Moreau), and she infatuates both men. Indeed, for all their love of books, these pals come alive only when they meet this magnificently desirable and dangerous young woman. And, although the film is named after them, its center or animating force is Catherine, around whom they circle irresistibly. She is a creature both utterly timeless (as we see her visage in the slide of a Greek statue) and forever changing—at different points, she plays the roles of Chaplinesque tramp and street tough, beguiling vamp and doting

mother. Passionate and iconoclastic, Catherine is, in fact, the only true free spirit among these three. Just as the men put their talent into their art, so she puts her genius into living—or perhaps into claiming for herself the reckless male freedoms that women have traditionally been denied. Time and again in this film, she literally dresses herself in the garb of masculinity.

On paper, the mercurial Catherine seems an implausibly grandiose conception, a woman both giddy and tragic, proto-feminist and male-dominated, driven by Eros and Thanatos. But as played by Moreau, a pop-eyed siren with the ferocity of Bette Davis and the kitty-cat wiles of Tuesday Weld, Catherine becomes one of the modern movies' triumphant characterizations—the anima as autocrat. Whether playing with vitriol or jumping into the Seine, she elevates capriciousness to an existential principle. When Jim says he understands her, she replies, "I don't want to be understood." And this is absolutely true. She comes into Jules and Jim's lives under the aegis of art, and they appear to create her by investing her with the properties that both attract them to her and divide them from each other. For her part, Catherine, being human, cannot resist her own apotheosis. Thus, from the beginning, she commands Jules and Jim, and her mere wishes become elevated to the level of a philosophical program: utter liberation.

Jules, who has been unlucky in love while away from home, begins to court Catherine—with his friend's blessing. Her independence, which Jules attributes to Catherine's mixed parentage (her father was a French aristocrat, her mother, a lower-class Briton), fascinates Jim, but her freedom and spontaneity rather overwhelm Jules. (Jules himself, by the way, is designated a Jew in Roché's novel but not in the film.) At her whim, they set up residence in the southern French countryside; when she decides that she misses Paris, they instantly return. The moment the men ignore her, Catherine rebels—either playfully, as when she slaps Jules for not responding to her jokes, or disturbingly, as when she suddenly leaps into the Seine to protest their disparaging remarks about women following the production of August Strindberg's play *Miss Julie* (1888). Jules is frightened by this strange, ominous act; Jim admires it, and draws Catherine's leap from memory the next day.

In time, Jules's innocent charm and bemused tolerance of Catherine's impulsiveness win her over, and she accepts his proposal of marriage shortly before the outbreak of World War I. "You haven't known a lot of women, but I have known many men," she tells Jules. "It balances out, so perhaps we'd make a good couple." The war—presented in a stunning montage of archival footage, much of it stretched to Scope dimensions—divides the film into two parts and separates not only Catherine and Jules, but also the latter and Jim, whose greatest concern is to avoid killing each other. (The Great War is so graphically documented that it brutalizes the earlier sentiments of the film, tossing its characters from their merry-go-round down to the ground, where they land, still and stunned.) Jules writes beautiful, erotic love letters to Catherine; Jim stays with his patient girlfriend, Gilberte, while home on leave. In a poignant reunion at Jules and Catherine's rustic chalet on the Rhine, the men resume their friendship.

Yet, things have changed. Though she has given Jules a daughter, Sabine, Catherine has not been domesticated. She has had several lovers, including Albert, the

singer who first showed Jules and Jim the statue and who now lives nearby. The stolid Jules fears losing his wife—rightly so, for he's too low-key and dull to keep her—but blames neither Catherine nor Albert. Jim is filled with sadness for Jules, but he is not surprised. When Catherine leads him on a long midnight walk through the woods and tells her side of the story, Jim finds himself inescapably drawn to her. "Was she deliberately seducing him?" the narrator asks. "Jim was not sure. Catherine only revealed what she wanted once she had it in hand." Out of loyalty to his and Jim's friendship and a desire to remain in her presence under any circumstances, Jules renounces his claims on Catherine and tells Jim to marry her. Once more the three set up house together, but this time it is Jim who is sleeping with Catherine, though he otherwise refuses to subject himself to her will.

The new arrangement seems to work for a while—as suggested by Truffaut's creation of an idyllic sequence of bicycle rides, songs, and domino games—but the relationships ineluctably become strained. Jim feels guilty that his friendship with Jules suffers, then jealous when Catherine seduces Jules one evening; Catherine resents the fact that Jim is younger than she and that he returns to Paris to say farewell to Gilberte. Only Jules remains stoic, loving them both. After a series of separations, infidelities, and reconciliations, the love affair between Catherine and Jim is broken off when she suffers a miscarriage and he resolves to marry Gilberte. In a deliberately melodramatic sequence, Catherine pulls a gun on Jim and threatens to shoot him, whereupon he escapes through an open window.

Some time later, Jules and Catherine accidentally meet Jim in Paris at the Cinéma des Ursulines (a favorite haunt of the New Wave group), where a newsreel records the Nazis in the act of burning books. (In Truffaut's *Fahrenheit 451* [1965], incidentally, Oskar Werner starred as a man whose duty it is to burn all books, in a society where reading is forbidden.) Though it is now 1934, Jules and Jim have hardly aged in twenty-two years; only Catherine shows the slightest sign of aging: she wears glasses after the war, a delicate touch signifying perhaps that she is slightly older than the men. (Thus does Truffaut visually dramatize one of the film's major themes: the inability of this trio to abandon a stage of youthful idealism in which they hold fast to fantasy and romance.) As the two male friends discuss the collapse of their world at an open-air café beside the Seine, Catherine, with a mischievous look in her eye, invites Jim to take a ride in the car with her and tells her husband to watch. She then drives off the edge of a broken bridge into the river, killing them both. (She is both fire and water—two elements with which she has often been identified during the film—choosing drowning for death, cremation for burial.) For the bewildered Jules, now a widower with a young child, Catherine's death nonetheless brings a great wave of relief. "His friendship with Jim had no equivalent in love," the narrator says.

If the film's plot is one of progressive decline, its images set off such diminutions at every turn. The first enthusiasts of *Jules and Jim* pointed to the interplay of circles and triangles in its images. The lovers directly illustrate the triangle they are living as they welcome the morning from three separate windows at their home near the sea in the south of France. The sharp angular pans of the camera themselves keep us wondering in which direction love must finally flow. But it is the spinning circularity of the motion-picture projector at the Ursulines that most viewers recall, a circularity

repeated in café tables, in a bowl around which tadpoles swim, in Catherine's cosmology that holds the world to be an inverted bowl. Bicycles move in circles; Sabine rolls over and over to the music that culminates in her mother's prophetic song "Le Tourbillon" ("The Whirlwind"), her "rondo of love." Helping to underscore Truffaut's visual ideas about the great circle of life, Raoul Coutard's camera at one point follows a young woman in a bar, does a 360° pan, and winds up watching Jules draw another girl's face on the surface of a round table.

These two master graphic forms, the circle and the triangle, come together in the hourglass measuring out the final days of *La Belle Époque* and the preciousness even of the briefest instants of life. Art, by contrast, is a kind of timeless measure, and *Jules and Jim* is a catalogue of the arts. Scattered throughout its texture are references to old films, to photography and slideshows, to statues, paintings, novels, the theater, and music. This is a story about the drive to raise life to art and art to eternity. That, of course, is one of the reasons both Jules and Jim are artistic types, and in this regard they are as similar as they are different. Jim writes and Jules write, quote, and are much influenced by literature. More important symbolically, and in the context of the romantic aura with which Truffaut surrounds these two men, is that we see both of them using letters to convey their deepest feelings and carry on their most intimate relationships. This element dramatizes their detachment from flesh-and-blood reality (like that of the soldier, known to Jim, who carried on a great romance solely through letters), just as their relationship to the statue on the Greek island emphasizes the mental character of their dealings with Catherine herself.

Truffaut further emphasizes the similarity between Jules and Jim by structuring Albert into the film. For this is no simple love triangle that he has created. Catherine does not simply play Jules off against Jim, or vice versa; rather, she impulsively uses Albert against both of them, as if they were one. Nor does Albert feel about her as Jules and Jim do. Although Albert is willing to marry her and become the father of little Sabine, only Jules and Jim worship Catherine as a goddess. Albert's female counterpart in *Jules and Jim* is Thérèse, whom Jules encounters at the start before he meets Catherine. Catherine's foil is Thérèse: the latter's game is casual, lighthearted promiscuity. She exploits her own sexuality in order to achieve pleasure, but for her such pleasure consists only in a variety of experiences, of carnal adventures. Unlike Catherine, she has no sense of her own importance, no depths; she does not make rules, she only breaks one (fidelity) repeatedly.

Truffaut's dazzling mixture of cinematic styles and mood shifts in *Jules and Jim* reinforces the above narrative at every stage. From slapstick humor and witty comedy in the first half of the film to the documentary war footage that divides the narrative in half, to the melodrama that pervades the final reel, *Jules and Jim* goes beyond merely rehearsing the New Wave's enthusiasm for the myriad possibilities of the medium. For example, the rapid cutting in the opening sequences reflects the *joie de vivre* of Bohemian Paris before the Great War, in addition to the energy that Jules and Jim invest in their friendship, their writing, and their goddess of love. Similarly, such techniques as mounting the camera on a bicycle to follow the group on their two-wheel jaunts in the countryside, as well as the aerial tracking shots that link the separated lovers, suggest the vitality of their relationship and their efforts to escape or

transcend the limits of social conventions and historical circumstances. Truffaut thus takes very seriously, indeed, the adjective in the phrase "motion picture." There is constant movement in his visual images here, particularly in the first part of the film (before World War I). And it is this movement, together with the narrative movement resulting from switches of tone or style, that serves to reflect the irrepressibility of the young protagonists' behavior.

As in the famous concluding shot to *The 400 Blows*, Truffaut again utilizes the freeze frame—the reverse of physical movement—but with much different effect here. The series of stop-action shots of Catherine early in the film identifies her with the statue that Jules and Jim had first seen on a projected slide; these shots also succeed in "freezing" or immortalizing her statuesque youth or charm, if only momentarily. (By contrast, the jump cuts or elliptical edits in *Jules and Jim* condense time and thereby suggest not only its ability to "fly," but also its inexorability.) The almost subliminal single freeze-frame shot of the two men reunited after the war is even more compelling, preserving the ideal of friendship at the very moment that it seems most precarious. Ultimately, the stylistic eclecticism of Truffaut's *Jules and Jim*, like that of Renoir's *Rules of the Game* (1939), expresses a vision of human experience in all its complexity and ambiguity.

The voice-over narration itself is an integral part of the film's cinematic style. It serves several important functions. First, such commentary compresses time and leaves the visual images free of the necessity to summarize, through action and dialogue, developing relationships or characterological histories; because the strength of the medium lies in its capacity to picture present-tense action, such a device is crucial in a film whose narrative spans over twenty years. Second, the flat and expressionless (if not somewhat melancholy) tonalities of the voice-over commentary suggest a mature onlooker, an observer whose witness provides balance to the film's headlong rush to tragic conclusion. And third, the narrator's words give us access to Jim's but not Jules's inner thoughts, and thus allow us to follow the track of Jim's seeming good sense—until they start to chart for us the progress of his fatal involvement with Catherine.

One quality that has been almost universally ascribed to *Jules and Jim* is its lyricism, its lyric appreciation of life itself. Contributing to this quality is the film's use of music—yet another component of cinematic style. Rarely, however, does Truffaut employ Georges Delerue's music to counterpoint the emotional content of the film's images; instead, music is used here to enhance the visual rhythms synergistically, as when a particular musical theme is associated with the sheer physical exuberance of the romantic triangle. For example, we hear the melodious "joyful" theme first at the seaside villa, when Jules, Jim, and Catherine set off through the woods on the first brilliant morning after their arrival. The music enhances the spontaneous nature of the visuals, which capture the threesome's carefree and ebullient play. Later, we hear the same theme used more subtly at the reunion of the trio after the war; it is also audible as Jim rolls down a hill with Sabine in his arms.

A special musical theme is assigned to Catherine, and it is used with special effectiveness. This is Boris Bassiak's song "Le Tourbillon," which is integrated into the film's dramatic texture. The song is "composed" by Catherine and Albert and

sung by her to his guitar accompaniment at the Rhine chalet. The fact that Catherine works on the song suggests something about her character: her will to create, her almost fanatical desire to achieve a certain freedom of expression. In addition, and perhaps more important, the lyrics of "Le Tourbillon" capture and underline the thesis of the interaction between Catherine and all her men:

> She had eyes, eyes of opal.
> They fascinated me.
> Her pale face was an oval.
> What a fatal *femme* was she.
> …
> We met with a kiss,
> A hit then a miss.
> It wasn't all bliss.
> And we parted.
> We went our ways
> In life's whirlwind of days.
> I saw her again one night.
> Again, she was an enchanted sight.
> …

This melody is also played at the conclusion of the film, as Jules leaves the cemetery. It signals Catherine's symbolic presence, hence her final victory over both Jules and Jim even as her ashes are interred.

More than a dictionary of cinematic styles, musical and visual, or an entertaining variation on the familiar themes of *l'amour fou* and the *femme fatale*—each of which marks the mainstream of Truffaut's work—*Jules and Jim* is a meditation on art and history, social convention and private morality, love and friendship. In one sense, the film describes the continuous efforts of the central characters (sometimes heroic, sometimes perverse) to make deathless art out of fleeting life, and thereby to overcome the impositions of protean history. Indeed, the passage of time in *Jules and Jim* is seen through a chronological succession of Picassos, as well as through the insertion of documentary footage. Catherine herself is linked to the enduring or perennial appeal of art by means of her identification with the ancient statue, although in later stages of the picture—when she dons spectacles or, in a profoundly expressive long take, slowly wipes cold cream from her face in front of a dressing-table mirror—she paradoxically comes to represent both timelessness and mutability.

For their part, Jules and Jim, who first meet on their way to the Quatres Arts Ball, not only write books (Jim reads from his novel about two friends named Jacques and Julien; after the war, Jules, an entomologist by profession, describes a love story he is planning with insects as characters), they also translate each other's work, as well as discuss Shakespeare, Strindberg, Baudelaire, and Goethe—tellingly, the latter's *Elective Affinities* (1809). Catherine, however, remains their greatest creation, their eternal muse. When the two men meet for the last time, they lament not only the Nazi book burnings that signify the destruction of the culture they have worshipped, but

also their own failure as artists to sustain their vital, human illusion. Perhaps it is because Catherine alone has remained an unregenerate Bohemian, true to the spirit that once bound the three of them together, that she paradoxically decides to save in memory what she can of the love triangle by destroying it in reality.

Like a true goddess ("une vrai femme," Jules calls her), Catherine works in mysterious ways. Indeed, to interpret *Jules and Jim* requires an understanding of her character, and Truffaut willfully precludes the possibility of definitive analysis or judgment. She can be described as neurotic, tyrannical, immoral, even insane; she can also be seen as a victim of biology, patriarchy, and history. Undoubtedly, Catherine stands as one of the greatest female figures in all of cinema, in large measure because of Jeanne Moreau's remarkable performance. Truffaut himself deserves much of the credit, as well, for taking the risk to film such a script. "The gamble for me," he said, "was to make the woman moving…and not a tart, and to prevent her husband from seeming ridiculous" (Bayer, 159). He succeeded by remaining sympathetic to each of his three main characters at the same time that he conveyed an awareness of the impossibility of their quest for absolute freedom—romantic or otherwise.

The pervasive ambiguity of *Jules and Jim* may be illustrated by two of its most emotionally moving moments: when Jim first kisses Catherine, and when Catherine returns to her husband's room after quarreling with Jim. In each case, the content of the scene—consummation in the first, reconciliation in the second—is subtly complicated, even subverted, by its cinematic presentation. Let's begin with the consummation scene. From the time very early in the film when Jules invites Jim to visit him and Catherine but pleads, "Not this one, Jim," the narrative has been leading to this climax in which Jim's desire for Catherine overcomes his loyalty to Jules. Truffaut prepares the viewer with several romantic codes or cues: a midnight tryst, Delerue's lush music, soft-focus cinematography, and low-key lighting. As Jim enters the chalet to return Catherine's copy of Goethe's *Elective Affinities*, she leads him to a window where he traces her silhouetted profile, reaches her mouth, and raises it. A close-up then reveals a fly crawling across the windowpane, and, as Jim bends to kiss Catherine, the small insect appears to light upon her uplifted lips. Thus in a single astonishing moment, Truffaut has poisoned the kiss and, by association with Jules's occupation as an entomologist, has signified the latter's own presence in this dark moment of intimacy.

Another extraordinary example of the film's visual complexity occurs soon afterwards when Catherine crosses the hall to her husband's room to complain about Jim. After he calmly defends his friend and she accuses Jules of despising her, he replies, "No, Catherine, I have never despised you. I shall always love you, whatever you do, whatever happens." To this point, the scene has been composed entirely of alternating shots of the two characters, but now, as they embrace and Catherine tearfully recalls their happy moments together, Truffaut includes them both in a tight close-up. This scene balances, in its intimacy, the earlier one with Jim, but again Truffaut's *mise-en-scène* brilliantly undercuts the close shot's apparent meaning. For, as Catherine kisses Jules, her face fills the screen, threatening to push him off the left edge of the frame. Even at the moment when she appears most vulnerable and affectionate, then, Catherine feels the need to dominate.

In the end, however, Catherine's feelings and desires are defeated by the same destiny that overcomes all human beings. After her death, moreover, she had wanted her ashes scattered to the wind, the narrator relates, but even that "was not permitted" for it was against the rules. *Jules and Jim* itself endures: a paean to those who dream of living in total freedom, who dare to defy the existing rules, and who, in ultimately failing, nonetheless affirm not only the wonder of all human aspiration and the vitality of life itself, but also life's dreamlike evanescence. Just so, Jean-Paul Sartre once wrote that the greatest art is about the passing of time. Truffaut's *Jules and Jim* is such a work.

From the beginning, the film itself was treated precisely as a great work, as a magnificent artistic success, with Truffaut winning praise from such personal heroes as Jean Cocteau and Jean Renoir. He even received a gushing letter from the seventy-five-year-old Helen Hessel, the real-life, Seine-jumping model for Catherine who married Jules, became a poet, and, in fact, shot Jim. She told Truffaut that he'd captured on film the essence of the trio's intimate emotions. Such accolades, however, didn't keep France's Commission for the Control of Films from forbidding viewers under the age of eighteen from seeing *Jules and Jim* because of its "immoral character"—a decision that would be replicated in many other countries. From our present-day vantage point, when nude sex scenes are *de rigueur* on cable TV, such a decision may seem incredible. But this was 1962, and while the New Wave may have been reinventing cinema, French censors weren't ready to reinvent bourgeois morality.

Perhaps a bit naïvely for a Young Turk, Truffaut was shocked by the ban, but he clutched at the nearest straw. The president of the Commission, Henry de Ségogne, told him that its board might reconsider if he could gather a series of laudatory statements concerning *Jules and Jim* from luminaries. Truffaut set about doing just that, writing to Cocteau, Renoir, and Alain Resnais in request for their support and getting it. Still, despite this illustrious backing, the Commission refused to reverse its original decision, condemning a supposedly immoral movie that would one day be shown in high-school classes. Happily in this case, one man's immorality has become another man's immortality. *Vive Jules et Jim*...and Catherine!

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## FILMOGRAPHY: KEY FILMS OF THE FRENCH NEW WAVE

*La Pointe Courte* (1955), directed by Agnès Varda

*Bob le flambeur* (1956), directed by Jean-Pierre Melville

*Elevator to the Gallows* (1958), directed by Louis Malle

*Le beau Serge* (1958), directed by Claude Chabrol

*Hiroshima, mon amour* (1959), directed by Alain Resnais

*The 400 Blows* (1959), directed by François Truffaut

*The Sign of Leo* (1959), directed by Eric Rohmer

*Les Cousins* (1959), directed by Claude Chabrol

*Shoot the Piano Player* (1960), directed by François Truffaut

*Les Bonnes femmes* (1960), directed by Claude Chabrol

*Le Petit soldat* (1960), directed by Jean-Luc Godard

*Breathless* (1960), directed by Jean-Luc Godard

*Paris Belongs to Us* (1961), Jacques Rivette

*Last Year at Marienbad* (1961), directed by Alain Resnais

*Adieu Philippine* (1962), directed by Jacques Rozier

*Jules and Jim* (1962), directed by François Truffaut

*Cléo from 5 to 7* (1962), directed by Agnès Varda

*Vivre sa vie* (1962), directed by Jean-Luc Godard

*La Jetée* (1962), directed by Chris Marker

*Les Carabiniers* (1963), directed by Jean-Luc Godard

*Contempt* (1963), directed by Jean-Luc Godard

*Band of Outsiders* (1964), directed by Jean-Luc Godard

*Alphaville* (1965), directed by Jean-Luc Godard

*Weekend* (1967), directed by Jean-Luc Godard

*L'Amour fou* (1968), directed by Jacques Rivette

*My Night at Maud'*s (1969), directed by Eric Rohmer

*Claire's Knee* (1970), directed by Eric Rohmer

*The Mother and the Whore* (1973), directed by Jean Eustache

*Céline and Julie Go Boating* (1974), directed by Jacques Rivette

CHAPTER 12

# Federico Fellini's *8½*



I was going to begin this essay with some facts about Federico Fellini's life. But any such account, I quickly realized, must be approximate. For Fellini enjoyed obfuscation, and his own recollections about his past varied according to whim. Indeed, his enemies often labeled him a *buggiardo*, a big liar; and his wife, Giulietta Masina, herself said that Federico blushed only when he told the truth. Yet his many friends generally discerned in him a rare sincerity. Both qualities—the obfuscatory or evasive, the sincere or revelatory—course through Fellini's interviews, and these qualities are not unrelated to the intermingling in his films themselves of fantasy and verity, reality and illusion. "You could call hallucination a deeper reality," Fellini once told the interviewer Dan Yakir. "In any event, I see no line between the imaginary and the actual" (35).

Fellini even said to the novelist Alberto Moravia that he had tried to eliminate the idea of history from his *Satyricon* (1969), "the idea that the ancient world *really* existed…I used an iconography that has the allusiveness and intangibility of dreams." In reply to the next, logical question, the director said that his movie dream of Petronius was a dream dreamed by himself, and then Moravia asked, "I wonder why you dreamt such a dream." Fellini replied: "The movies wanted me to" (168). Exactly, just as his alter ego Guido in *8½* (1963) was begging the movies to command a dream from *him*.

Fellini's reply to Moravia's question contains all the truth and fakery and truth about fakery that have made Fellini, the artist and the man, one of the most

appealing of modern film figures—one who, in his simultaneous dealing with truth-tellers and pretenders, realists and dreamers, reprised the two distinctive directions in which, from the beginning, the cinema itself had developed. Fellini's own life in art was spent in the service of both reality and non-reality largely because he knew, as one of the few film masters who also understood theatricality (perhaps since his own self was so histrionic), that theater without artifice is a fake ideal and a naïf's idea of the truth.

To the life itself: this much is known with certainty, or a degree of certainty, about Fellini's early existence. He was born in 1920 in Rimini, a small town on Italy's Adriatic coast. (The seaside would turn out to be important in many of his pictures.) For several years he attended a boarding school, run by Catholic priests, at Fano—also on the Adriatic. During those school years, at the age of seven or eight, Federico ran away to follow a traveling circus until his truancy was discovered and he was returned (after one night? within several days?) to his parents. This incident seems to have left an indelible impression on Fellini's mind, for, even as priests, together with nuns, were to find their ritualistic place in many of his films, so too did the circus become for him a source of inspiration for his work as a movie director.

During his last year in Rimini—1937—which was also his last year of high school, Fellini and several of his friends were frequent truants, leading the idle, empty (but fantasy-filled) street life he was later to depict so vividly in *I vitelloni* (1953). Like Moraldo in this film, Fellini escaped from the hopeless limbo of Rimini shortly thereafter, making his way to Florence, where he worked as an illustrator for a comic-strip story magazine. This experience itself would provide the background for his movie *The White Sheik* (1952), which chronicles a provincial bride's misadventures in Rome with the man of her dreams—not her new husband, but instead a star of the *fumetti* (enormously popular magazines telling romantic stories in photo-strip form). After six months or so, Fellini moved on again, to Rome, where he drew cartoons and caricatures for the satirical publication *Marc' Aurelio*, in addition to becoming one of the writers for a radio serial based on this magazine's most popular feature story ("Cico and Pallina," Italy's answer to Dagwood and Blondie).

Soon tiring of this work, Fellini joined his friend, the music-hall comedian (and later character actor in films) Aldo Fabrizi, on a 1939 odyssey across Italy with a vaudeville troupe for which he performed a variety of duties, such as sketch artist, wardrobe master, scenery painter, traveling secretary, and bit player. Years later, Fellini would tell Tay Garnett that this was

> perhaps the most important year of my life…I was overwhelmed by the variety of the country's physical landscape and, too, by the variety of its human landscape. It was the kind of experience that few young men are fortunate enough to have—a chance to discover character of one's country and, at the same time, to discover one's own identity. (72)

Back in Rome by the early 1940s, he began not only a new career as a gag writer for comic movies, but also his courtship of the young actress Giulietta Masina. Her distinctive personality—puckish, vulnerable, yet resilient—clearly fired Fellini's

imagination, and together they were to forge a unique alliance in the Italian cinema of their time: one on which he commented in a number of interviews.

By the end of the war, Fellini was married to Masina and working as a co-scenarist and assistant director for the leading neorealist filmmaker, Roberto Rossellini, on such pictures as *Rome, Open City* (1945) and *Paisan* (1946). Following several assignments in the late 1940s as a co-screenwriter or assistant director for Pietro Germi and Alberto Lattuada, Fellini took his first stab at directing with *Variety Lights* (1951), a collaborative effort with Lattuada from Fellini's original story about a troupe of actors not unlike the vaudevillians with whom he had traveled the country a little over a decade before. Then he made five feature films on his own, all of which show two dominant influences: the neorealistic Rossellini and the re-imagined materials of Fellini's life.

These earlier films are the ones that have by far the closest relation in Fellini to the Second World War—in style, not in subject. Neorealism was a stylistic response to the war, and his early films are his response to that response. A biographical fact, as well as an aesthetic atmosphere, may be involved. Fellini was not caught up in the war. Since he was born in 1920, he was of age for military service, but, with some ingenuity, he found medical reasons to avoid the draft—whether because he was anti-fascist or non-fascist, as has been conjectured, or simply out of self-preservation. We can't say or judge. But we can hazard that his first group of films, largely concerned with people struggling to survive, was a kind of indirect acknowledgment of the sufferings brought on by the war; and may have been seen by him as a sort of expiation.

His realist's compassion for the exploited of postwar Italy is on display in both *Il bidone* (*The Swindle*, 1955) and *The Nights of Cabiria* (1957). Fellini's long-standing romance with the circus and the theater appears not only in *Variety Lights* but also in *La strada* (*The Road*, 1954); as already noted, his impatience with small-town life can be found in *I vitelloni*, his comic-strip experience in *The White Sheik*. In this phase of his career, Fellini was, above all, an observer, constructing his films through juxtaposition: that is, through setting details of reconstructed reality side by side to point up a common denominator, or (more often) to expose the ironic relationship between unlike things. This method of construction is the one associated with neorealism, which Fellini himself defined in an interview with Charles Thomas Samuels as "the opposite of manufactured effects, of the laws of dramaturgy, spectacle, and even of cinematography" (126).

Continually awaiting an answer to, or a satisfaction of, their deepest needs—as they would get it in a conventional plot or entertainment—Fellini's characters are nonetheless always disappointed; what we see of them may literally cease at film's end, but in fact they never reach their final destination. Essential stasis is thus crucial to Fellini's world. Conventional dramaturgy, by contrast, exalts the will: characters want something; they reach out for it; and they get it or don't get it. Sometimes they fail, or succeed, because of circumstances; sometimes they do so because of another character. Whatever the case, their fate becomes established in a conflict that peaks in a climax, after which there is a dénouement. But such strategies Fellini either rejects or transforms. Like other directors who wish to wean the cinema from its addiction to

popular fiction and melodrama, he tries to inject the bracing truth that, from start to finish, life isn't very dramatic after all.

Among the neorealists, it's true, episodic structure and open endings are also fundamental strategies. Yet the scenarios of Cesare Zavattini don't avoid narrative causality and suspense; and, although Olmi's characters seem to wander in and out of unconnected experiences, they too eventually reach a turning point, so that in retrospect their wanderings appear to conform to a dramatic pattern. At his most characteristic, Fellini eliminates such remnants of conventional dramaturgy. Scenes are related in his films, not by causality or in order to create a crisis, but as illustrations of a state of being. At his best, Fellini shows us people in several versions of hopefulness, which, because it is unchanging and unassuageable, can achieve only the resolution of the *spectator's* understanding.

This constancy, rather than any outer achievement or inner alteration, is Fellini's typical subject; and he wants us to find it both deplorable and marvelous. Not simply for defying dramaturgical artifice or for showing that perception shapes experience does Fellini deserve to be credited with having deepened cinematic realism, however. His films are especially realistic in precluding unequivocal judgment. Life, Fellini intimates, is not dramatic but repetitious, not external but mediated by the imagination, and neither to be admired nor despised. And not wanting his audience to be partisan, he must simultaneously put us outside his characters to show their errors and inside them so that we do not dismiss them as fools. This double exposure, if you will—a subjective view laid over the objective—is the Fellinian touch that first signals the presence of a personal and incisive refinement of realism.

What further distinguishes Fellini from the neorealists is an insistence on the primary force of human imagination. His characters aren't solely motivated by externals—the theft of a bicycle, social indifference, child abandonment or neglect— as Vittorio De Sica's were. Nor, like Ermanno Olmi, does Fellini invert neorealism by studying only the human accommodation to such external circumstances. Instead, he denies the pure externality of events, choosing instead to show what he has repeatedly avowed in interviews: that reality and imagination interpenetrate. Thus Fellini's characters never face a fact without dressing it up: if, as in *I vitelloni*, they are in an empty piazza during the small hours of the night, they actively deny the implication that all human activities must pause; if, as in *The Nights of Cabiria*, they are stepping in place on a treadmill, they are nonetheless always on parade, decked out and boisterous.

It is, in fact, this "force of human imagination," as I have described it, that unites what many commentators otherwise consider the two halves of Fellini's career: the quasi-realist and the baroque-bordering-on-rococo. The second half begins with his first big international success, *La dolce vita* (*The Sweet Life*, 1960), where, for the first time, his subject was upper-class, well-to-do Italy—the problems in lives of *luxe* and leisure—and Fellini's treatment of this subject was much more symbolic in method, as well as much more elegant in manner. Maturity and self-confidence had much to do with the change, of course, but so did his upward social mobility. Success had come to Fellini; and with success had come that perk so important to serious artists who succeed—the chance to see that success is hollow.

To be sure, he is still the observer here: through the eyes of Marcello the journalist (Fellini's original ambition when he arrived in Rome), who, like Moraldo from the *vitelloni* quintet, left his hometown to seek a glorious future in the eternal city. But now the film director is like a gifted rube reporter of naughty High Life, for *La dolce vita* moves away from his early experience, out of which he had been creating, into a new social environment where he can only watch—and never actively participate or assimilate. (Consequently, the most authentic moment in the film is the visit of Marcello's father, who brings to the Italian capital the touch of the small town in which his son grew up.)

*La dolce vita*, then, can be called a transitional work that will be followed by, and has some connection to, Fellini's masterpiece, *8½*. The director himself intimated as much when he told Derek Prouse,

> I had a vague idea of *8½* even before *La dolce vita*: to try to show the dimensions of a man on all his different levels, intermingling his past, his dreams, and his memories, his physical and mental turmoil—all without chronology but giving the impression that man is a universe unto himself. But I couldn't resolve it and so made *La dolce vita* instead. (338)

One gets the feeling that, like Guido's artistic crisis in *8½*, Marcello's mounting spiritual crisis, which links the film's disparate incidents, might well have become Fellini's own had he allowed himself, as does his protagonist, to surrender to the frenzied Roman life around him.

After a three-year silence, Fellini made that picture about a protagonist whose crisis had become his own: *8½*, whose movie director can't settle on a subject for his next film. (Thus, in the seven years after 1956, he made only two features, having made six in his first six years.) The screenplay was written by Fellini and three collaborators, but, quite clearly, the job of these co-scenarists was to help Fellini put on paper some material from his innermost self, a script from which he could make a cinematic journey alone. The result was the film world's best work about an artist's desperation as an artist, a quasi-confessional comedy-cum-drama about the torment of the modern artist who is bursting with talent but can find nothing on which to expend it.

The result was also the revelation that Fellini was the epitome of the romantic, not the realistic, artist. Observation and synthesis were not really his mode: it had to have happened to *him* before he could transmute it into art. It was around 1800 that the subject matter of art became the maker himself, that the work ceased to be regarded as primarily a reflection of nature, actual or improved. The mirror held up to nature became transparent, as it were, and yielded insights into the mind and heart of the artist himself. This mode has long survived the formal romantic era, has survived realism and naturalism, has in fact become intensified in our own self-regarding twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Many films exemplify romanticism in the most serious sense—the artist as pilgrim, as both warrior and battlefield—but none more thoroughly than Fellini's *8½*.

Now the self-as-subject process of art-making is a ravenously gluttonous one and can—from time to time or even permanently—exhaust the artist, as it did Fellini. But some artists feel truthful only when they deny synthesis and deal solely with themselves. And through Fellini's career we can see this autobiographical impulse growing. As he relied more and more on his inner travails, less and less on what he had seen and could invent out of it, two things happened: the periods between his films grew longer, and Fellini's style—ornate, extravagant, flamboyant, grotesque, bizarre—became an increasingly prominent part of his work. *8½* is his first complete acceptance of the "new" Fellini, whose subject is himself and whose art lies in the transformation of self-knowledge through cinematic style.

The operative term here is "transformation," since I do not mean to characterize Fellini's use of romantic self-exploration as narcissistic or solipsistic. Indeed, a man who sees himself as a performer, which Fellini does on film as in conversation—who sees that the best of himself is in the theatricalization of that self—may in our day be closer to authenticity than those who delude themselves into believing that they are not self-conscious. This leads me to the most significant aspect of *8½*, the aspect that individuates Fellini's use of romantic self-exploration. This film about a man's need to make a film ends up as, in effect, the very film that the man is going to make (an opus number like 8½ being the perfect working title for a film whose subject—indeed, its very making—is in question). The artistic scion that this ambivalence suggests is, of course, Pirandello, especially *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921). Here, too, there are characters that have appeared to an author and can be dealt with only be being theatricalized, *performed*. Pirandello's people were imagined, Fellini's remembered or relived, but their needs are the same: self-actualization by any other name.

*Juliet of the Spirits* (1965) is the second manifestation of this new Fellini, or Fellini, Part Two. Like *8½*, it explores an interior landscape, but this time of a woman, played by Giulietta Masina. This was Fellini's first use of color—a medium that, as he indicates in several of his interviews, he had previously scorned—and *Juliet of the Spirits* was also the last film of his to win nearly unanimous critical approval or popular success until *Amarcord* in 1973. The reasons are not hard to locate, for, visually dazzling and indirectly autobiographical as *Juliet of the Spirits* may be, it has no coherent plot. Fellini himself agreed when he told Lillian Ross in a *New Yorker* profile that

> the story of this film is nothing. There *is* no story…Movies now have gone past the phase of prose narrative and are coming nearer and nearer to poetry. I am trying to free my work from certain constrictions—a story with a beginning, a development, and ending. It should be more like a poem, with meter and cadence. (64)

A *romantic* poem, one might add. The trouble with such poetry, in Fellini's case, is that the farther removed it became from his own past, his own self, the lesser it became—to the point that, in the manner of opera before the twentieth century, the story is a mere scaffolding for stylistic display or visual fireworks. Certainly this was

the problem that afflicted *Satyricon* and *Casanova* (1976), as well as, to a lesser extent, *Orchestra Rehearsal* (1979), *City of Women* (1980), *And the Ship Sails On* (1983), and *Ginger and Fred* (1985): all of them films that, to one degree or another, depend for their being entirely on the way they are made, on their look, apart from any depiction of character or accretion of drama (more on which later).

So desperate was Fellini to return to his senses, or his self, during this period that he made two quasi-documentaries in an effort to anchor himself in some kind of reality at the same time as he tried to confront the ghosts of his youth: the circus and clowning in the case of *The Clowns* (1970); the Italian capital in the instance of *Roma* (1972), what the city meant to him as a provincial youth, how it seemed when he arrived, and what he thought of it at middle age. On camera in *The Clowns*, Fellini even thematically connected these two films by calling the circus, like the city and even like the cinema itself, "an old whore who knows how to give many kinds of pleasure"—and who, like women in general, represented to him not only myth and mystery but also the thirst for knowledge and the search for one's own identity.

The pleasure in *The Clowns*, for one, consists at least in part in the recognition of familiar Fellini hallmarks apart from, say, the appearance of the earth-mother whore in several pictures and the use of silent openings (as in *8½*) as well as abrupt endings (like the freeze frame at the end of *I vitelloni*). First, the lighting—theatrical as ever. Often a character is first seen with his face completely shadowed before he "enters," in a kind of visual summary of Fellini's own theatrical personality (which enjoyed attention at the same time that, as the interviews of Fellini-the-artist make clear, it wanted to guard its privacy). Then there is Fellini's relating of the human face to Daumier-like caricature, as when, after the boy Federico sees his first circus, he perceives how many of his fellow townsmen look like clowns.

And in *The Clowns*, as always, there is Fellini's eye for deep composition—a mind-screen of the imagination, as it were. One example: after some schoolboys departing on a train insult a stationmaster in Fellini's hometown, the pompous little official begins jumping up and down with rage. In a shot down the platform, as the train pulls away, Fellini shows us not only the hopping-mad midget in the foreground but also, in various planes in the background, several fat men doubling up with laughter. The sanctification of memory touches this wonderful shot—wonderful in part because the fat "pots," made to seem fatter by their multiplication and their doubling up, are calling the diminutive "kettle" black—in the sense that it is silent: the sound under the shot is the narrator's voice, accompanied by music.

The search in *The Clowns* and *Roma* for his own identity, as Fellini put it, led to his temporary recovery from our age's gravest disease for artists: the inability to synthesize new subject matter out of experience, the shattering of creative confidence by the immensity of modern consciousness. As other artists have done in other arts, Fellini finally faced matters that had been haunting him all his adult life, nagging to get into his work, and he gave them a whole film in *Amarcord*—"whole" because his total surrender to the ghosts of his past provided him the best chance to use his supreme (and supremely unique) visual style since the monumental *8½*. *Amarcord*—a word that, in the dialect of Fellini's native Rimini, means "I remember"—is rich with memory, desire for memory, memory of desire; and the director never exhibited better

than he does here his startling eye for the quintessentially right face, his maestro's ability to build and develop and finish sequences like music, his firm conviction that life is more lifelike when you touch it up a bit.

In *Amarcord*, Fellini remembered 1930s Rimini so feelingly and so well that, like all memoirs made with good art, we possess it at once. It becomes our past, too. Many of us will recognize how the people in such a town become characters in an integrated drama being performed for one's self when young, and how, for everyone, the figures of the past, pleasant and unpleasant, become rarefied through the years into talismans. In any event, the viewer recognizes the fundamental verity of the film: that memory is the only place toward which life heads certainly. And he or she recognizes a secondary verity as well: that, in transferring the recesses of recall to the screen with the knowledge that his past was no longer verifiable fact, it was an all-obsessing dream, Fellini established anew the primal commonwealth of cinema and dream, movies and memory, psychic exploration and filmic fabrication. As Fellini himself put the matter in a comment to his long-time assistant Eugene Walker, "Think what a bale of memories and associations we all carry about with us. It's like seeing a dozen films simultaneously!" (Prouse, 341).

That last exclamation should give the reader some idea of Fellini's sense of humor, evident (as one might guess) not only in his interviews but also in his films. Indeed, what distinguishes him from other directors of his eminence is precisely his humor. Bergman proved his short supply of it in his few comedies. Antonioni rarely even attempted to be funny. And Kurosawa had humorous touches but they were almost always grim, not high-spirited. Fellini alone of this group looked on the world's woes, on human travail, with a mischievous eye. Comedy, of course, is by no means automatically synonymous with shallowness, something the filmmaker proved in *8½*, which was a cascade of bitter, funny, scintillating, sometimes deeply probing jokes on himself: for the silliness of his situation, of his century, of the plight of art, and for the absurdity of ever having been born.

*Intervista* (1987)—Fellini's penultimate picture—has the context of *8½* without its center. The framework is a visit to Cinecittà, the large film-studio complex outside Rome, by some Japanese television people who have come to interview Fellini as he prepares a picture based on Kafka's 1927 novel *Amerika* (a film that the director had at one time actually contemplated making). *Intervista* was thus yet another pseudo-documentary, like *The Clowns* and *Roma*, which proved how desperate Fellini was to find a film subject, a subject to film other than (literally) himself—how much in fact he had become, in a reversal of the Pirandellian scheme, an author in search of sundry characters. Fellini himself put a bold face on the picture when he described it to as "the ultimate result of my way of making cinema: where there is no longer a story or a script, only the feeling, precisely, of being inside a kind of creativity that refuses every preconceived order" (Cardullo, xvi). Nevertheless, this affectionate divertissement, which characteristically balances illusion and reality, can be seen as a self-homage from an artist who had earned the right.

Even as Fellini appeared as himself in *Intervista,* so too did Anita Ekberg, who had acted years before in *La dolce vita*. And her presence raises the subject of Fellini's view of women, here and elsewhere in his *oeuvre*—particularly in light of his

famous comment to Gideon Bachmann in late 1980 that "the cinema [is] a woman," that "going to the cinema is like returning to the womb; you sit there, still and meditative in the darkness, waiting for life to appear on the screen" (7). Fellini's view of women was never as empathetic as Antonioni's, whose moral protagonists were often females. And even when Fellini used a female protagonist, as in *La strada*, *The Nights of Cabiria*, and *Juliet of the Spirits*, she was a woman who accepted her life as determined by men. His women, than, are figures, often secondary ones, in a man's world: Fellini's own. This quality may in time date him, but it cannot affect his magic as a portrayer of that world.

That magic has something to do with the very nature of Cinecittà, where Fellini shot his films and to which *Intervista* can be viewed as an homage as well. What moves us at Cinecittà, why it is so powerfully mysterious to see a tower of arc lights beam into life against the dark, why the immense space of an empty sound stage seems to echo even when it is silent, is that here occurs an argument with mortality. The mere fact that film can fix the moment implies that time is rushing by even when the moment is being fixed. In other words, film, with all its fakeries, understands death. And Fellini, the most honest and lovable faker who ever made a film, understood life. He understood, as he related in an unpublished 1986 conversation with me, that "I have to re-create life in a studio instead of using actuality, because I have to put myself in it."

So he did, this most naked of all film geniuses at the same time as he was the world's greatest off-screen actor, convincing us throughout his career of his showman's honesty, his genuineness through artifice, in conjuring the past and the present, the fancied, the contrived, and the true, into a glittering show of his own truth—Fellini's, not the "Fellini-esque," which is already something once removed from the real Italian thing. The final film of that career was *The Voice of the Moon* (1990), which may come closer to being surreal than any of his other works. The initial idea came to him after reading Ermanno Cavazzoni's 1987 novel *Il poema dei lunatici*, which is about mad people in Italy. He didn't adapt the novel: it simply stimulated him, particularly since, some thirty years earlier, he had spent five or six weeks with the director of a mental hospital in Tuscany, who lived on the premises.

*The Voice of the Moon* is not in any sense a clinical study. It's a poetical rhapsody, much more indebted to Giacomo Leopardi (who is quoted) than to Sigmund Freud. The central character, played by Roberto Benigni, is a man in a small town, lately a patient in a mental hospital, who wanders gently through that town, often at night by the light of the moon, and who thinks he hears voices from a well. But principal among his adventures are his encounters with the noise and mess of modern life—the intrusions of the media, a tawdry beauty contest—which drown out the whisperings of the soul heard by the only people still sane enough to hear them: the mad and the simple. The Benigni character's madness chiefly manifests itself in his quest for purity and order. (In *8½* the vision in white, played by Claudia Cardinale, tells the protagonist that she has come into his life to bring purity and order.) That quest never ends, of course, and the Benigni character never quite understands the voices from the well, either. At the end the moon speaks to him, with the voice of a woman in his town whom he has worshiped from afar. She bids him to stop trying to

understand those voices, to be grateful that at least he can hear them. In the middle of her remarks, she begs to be excused—a break for a commercial, she says.

Unique though it is in theme, *The Voice of the Moon* is nonetheless typical of Fellini—in its heterodoxy, its deployment of the opposite of firm structure. Rather than being programmatic narrative or drama, this film is investigation—of milieu, mood, character. Think of some of the other films Fellini made in such a free-hand manner: *Amarcord*, *The Clowns*, *Roma*, *Intervista*. True, some of his clearly structured films, *La dolce vita* and *8½*, share that freehand style to a degree as Fellini fulfills their designs; but in *The Voice of the Mo*on and elsewhere in his *oeuvre*, the style is almost the *raison d'être*. The odd aspect of these style-centered films is that, as I've suggested, in full career perspective, they seem inventions mothered by necessity.

Here is another, form-related speculation, related to my initial "romantic" speculation, as to why Fellini made these free-hand films. He had cut loose from the people among whom he grew up in Rimini, had moved from the imperatives of sheer survival to the luxury of Roman melancholy and despair. After his first two films in this contemplative vein, *La dolce vita* and *8½*, he had great difficulty—like Guido in the latter picture—in synthesizing narrative out of his new social and spiritual environment. Yet he was brimming with talents that he had to use. A post-Guido Guido, he more or less gave up on constructing conventional narratives or dramas and turned to the exploration of his talents in themselves, employing them on memory, not on new experience. His new experience was not as fertile for him as was the past. The past is the real site of *Amarcord* and *The Clowns*, of *Intervista* and *And the Ship Sails On*. A yearning for the lost orderliness of the past is the dominant key of *The Voice of the Moon*.

Out of these necessities and pressures came the new Fellini form, best described by a literary term—the personal essay. Henry Ward Beecher said that doubtless the Lord could have invented a better fruit than the strawberry but doubtless also he never did (Kains, 180). We might say, somewhat lower down the scale, that doubtless Fellini could have commissioned scripts, from others, of greater cogency but doubtless also he never did. He preferred now to make, or could do nothing but make, films out of his remembrance and his talents themselves. Indeed, the genuine *raison d'être* of these free-form pictures could be said to be in the opportunities they provided for Fellini. The reason that certain operas exist is that certain singers existed who could sing them. The prime reason for these films is that Fellini is a prodigious film virtuoso. In *La dolce vita*, for inceptive instance, there is a strong sense of theme used as opportunity rather than as concern. This sense was strengthened in his section of the anthology picture *Boccaccio '70* (1962). It flowers in *8½*.

I offer the above observation in appraisal, not derogation. Virtuosity has an aesthetic and value of its own, whether it is coloratura singing or fantastic pirouettes or *trompe-l'oeil* painting, and when it is as overwhelming as Fellini's virtuosity, one can be moved by it very nearly as much as by art that "says" something. In fact I don't think that *8½* "says" very much, but it is breathtaking to watch. One doesn't come away from it as from, say, the best Bergman or Renoir—with a continuing sense of immanent experience; one has to think *back* to it and remember the effect. But that

is easy, for the experience is unforgettable. Let me conclude the first portion of this essay by quoting Guido's line from *8½* that he has nothing to say, but he is going to say it anyway. So too did Fellini during the second half of his career. In the process he nonetheless made it a pleasure, not a lesson, to be present at his creations.

One of those creations, of course, was *8½*, which I'd now like to discuss in some detail. The title itself is a declaration. While the picture was in production, Fellini gave it the working tag *8½* merely as an opus number, since his previous output of features (six) and shorts (three "half" segments to anthology films) totaled seven-and-a-half and he couldn't think of a title. To put it another way, the dilemma about the title fits the movie perfectly. Fellini himself said that *8½* is not autobiographical, at least no more than any of his films; that, although many of the details come from his past, it was only shortly before the start of shooting that he decided to make Guido a director. (First he had been "just anyone," then a screenwriter.) But, from the title-trouble on, it takes a considerable stretch to believe that this film about a director who cannot resolve his ideas for a film was made by a director who was teeming with ideas and just happened to choose this one. In fact, Fellini's slow progress toward making his hero a director, thus in at least some degree facing his own life, has, as we shall see, a certain parallel with the internals of *8½*—and hence makes the picture even more autobiographical.

The protagonist, Guido Anselmi (Marcello Mastroianni), is a director in his forties who has already done some pre-production work on his next film but doesn't have anything like a final script and can't clarify his ideas. He is at a luxurious spa, both resting and working. (Fellini chose the setting of *8½* while at a spa called Chinciano.) With Guido are some of his production crew, some of his associates, and various actors who are engaged for the film or want to be, because at least part of the still-inchoate picture is to be shot nearby. With him also is his writer, a fair sample of the intellectual *manqué* who clings to much European filmmaking as both a suppliant and a hair-shirt. Not far from the spa a huge steel tower, a sort of spaceship launching-pad, has been erected for use in the movie (about the escape to outer space by the survivors of World War III)—one of the few matters that, presumably, Guido is sure about.

His mistress comes to stay at another hotel in the resort town; his wife (Anouk Aimée) also comes to stay with him and is not deceived about the mistress. (One of the best moments is Guido's lying about the mistress to his wife with the face of truth and the wife's knowledge of this and her disgust—principally that her husband can sound so truthful when he lies; and, further, *his* knowledge of *her* knowledge.) His producer arrives to push Guido, after months of vacillation, to resolve the issue of the script and, partly on the basis of screen tests previously made, to settle the casting. Paralyzed by apathy and ennui, the director feels the pressure growing. At the last minute, he decides to give up trying to invent a story and to make a film about his life—out of the very elements we have been witnessing, about all the facts of his present as well as his past.

This is the surface of *8½*. But the film is carried forward in surface *and* in depth, in a tapestry of the real and the non-real (if we use real to mean the present waking moment). Three kinds of non-reality weave around and intersect the bare outline

above: Guido's dreams, his daydreams, and his memories. The film is thus thickly laced with fantasy—with recollection, projection, and wish-fulfillment. Guido spends about as much time out of present reality as in it. The three currents of non-reality, controlled and uncontrollable, course around and through the dilemmas of his day, help to explain them, and help to fuse his resolution, desperate yet inspired, at the end. We see enough of Guido's past to understand some of his fixations and aversions; we see enough of his dreams to understand his fears and desires; we see enough of his daydreams to understand why he is an artist and what the solaces, as well as the limits, of his art are.

On its most accessible level, then—the biographical one—*8½* is the story of Guido, a motion-picture director not unlike Fellini himself, who has lost his source of inspiration both in his art and in his life. He invariably turns inward to examine the generative events of his personal development—his boyhood, the Church, his relationship with his parents, and the women of his life—as well as the dreams, nightmares, or visions accompanying each. It is only when Guido symbolically returns to the womb at the end of the film by crawling under the table at a gigantic press conference, where he squeezes a revolver to his temple, that he can be reborn. Declaring "Clean…disinfect," Guido pulls the trigger. Like an artistic phoenix, he is subsequently reborn in his own creative ashes and rises to receive the inspiration that will enable him to create an entirely new kind of film from the experiences of the old.

The most striking aspect of *8½*, which is not true of every film, not even of every fine film, is the very way it looks. The richness of almost every frame comes from three factors: first, of course, Fellini's eye; second and third, the articulation of his intentions by the camerawork and by the design of the settings, together with the costumes. The cinematographer was Gianni Di Venanzo (who died in 1966 at the age of forty-six), whose work on such pictures as Antonioni's *La notte* (1961) and *L'eclisse* (1962) and Francesco Rosi's *The Moment of Truth* (1965) helped to make the first decades after World War II in Italy a high point in cinema history. Di Venanzo's sensitive gradations of black and white here seem more colorful than many movies in color, at the same time that the film revels in its black-and-white quality. Indeed, in terms of visual execution and ingenuity of image, I cannot remember a more brilliant picture than *8½*.

The sets and costumes, even the coiffures, were by Piero Gherardi, who had joined Fellini on *The Nights of Cabiria* and who had, on *La dolce vita*, helped transform his work from displaying the look of life to displaying the look of life-as-theater. Women's dresses and hats in particular become a way of extending their characters, of embodying men's fantasies about them. But everything that Gherardi touches in *8½*, from a railroad station to a concrete garden seat in which a short-legged monk sits and swings his feet, creates a world that, in pure romantic process, has been seized, fondled, and given back to us in revised, personal form. Indeed, no one who has seen *8½* could ever mistake one minute of it—hardly one frame—for any other film.

Less immediately marked than the visual quality, yet pervasive, is the music by Nino Rota, who did the scores for all Fellini films until his own death in 1979. (Besides his movie work, which included the music for such pictures as Visconti's

*Rocco and His Brothers* [1960], Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet* [1968], and Coppola's *Godfather, I & II* [1972, 1974], Rota was the head of the conservatory Liceo Musicalo in Bari for almost thirty years.) "Score" is rather a grand term for what amounts to a few songs, including a miniature circus march, that are played and replayed and quoted, but they are lovely and utterly inseparable from the film—partly because they help to make the whole cohesive. It's impossible to think of *8½*, then, without thinking of Rota's music. We hear a  musical wizard here at the height of his wizardry, and it has something of the effect,  given in contemporary reports, of Liszt playing Liszt.

As for the acting, Marcello Mastroianni, wearing the big black hat, dark suit, and white shirt that Fellini customarily wore, is at his best in playing the director, which means in the upper echelon of the history of film acting. He invests the role with presence and portent. *Divorce Italian Style* (1961, dir. Pietro Germi) clarified to many what was apparent years ago to some: that Mastroianni is a skillful comedian. Here he interweaves that skill with his ability to touch the commonplaces of life with grave poetry. He encompasses Guido completely, to the last stab of anguish, the last hope for perfection, the last twinge of male silliness and guilt. Mastroianni first appeared as a kind of stand-in for Fellini in *La dolce vita*; he went on to perform, not only in *8½*, but also in Fellini's *City of Women*, *Ginger and Fred*, and *Intervista*.

Anouk Aimée as the wife and Sandra Milo as the mistress give complexity, with great ease, to roles that might have tended toward the monochromatic: the serious-silly, pneumatic girlfriend and the wronged yet forbearing spouse. But the hallmark of Fellini's casting is the way in which he fills even the smallest parts. (Remember that he had been a cartoonist. And that he named Guido's script collaborator after the nineteenth-century French caricaturist Honoré Daumier.) The briefest extra bit is played by a person with a face that is not only appropriate but that comments on its own appropriateness. For a special epicene (as opposed to purely homosexual) quality, he even has some of the priests in Guido's school memories played by older women.

Fellini had a certain extra freedom in his casting because, for him, film acting is divisible into body and voice; many of the parts, in the Italian *8½*, are therefore dubbed by other actors. What this means, in Fellini's unique case, is that he casts twice, perfectly. Those who know Anouk Aimée from her French films would nevertheless not know that she is dubbed here. Even those who, like me, object to dubbing on principle, couldn't object to Aimée's dubbing because they couldn't tell that it had been done by someone else.

The film opens more or less silently. Guido is in his car alone, windows closed, stalled in a traffic jam in a Roman vehicular tunnel. Then we notice that the people in the surrounding cars, in a neighboring bus, are also silent, and that they are all staring at him with hostile curiosity. In addition we see, among other things, Guido's mistress (as yet, unknown to us) being fondled by a stranger. The sounds of breathing and a beating heart, which are all that we hear, establish that this is a dream. Guido begins to stifle in the confining car, cannot see through the breath-beclouded windshield or open the windows, and paws at the glass—as we hear the squeal of his fingers on that glass. He is trapped, suffocating, in a precise objectification of his condition: that his

blockage merges professional and sexual fright is reflected by the image of a fancy automobile immobilized in a tunnel; that the woman being fondled by another man is Guido's mistress establishes his fear of losing potency.

Suddenly he floats up through the inexplicably opened sunroof of the car and is flying high in the air. He is over a beach, like a balloon, and we are with him—looking down a long rope tied to his leg, in something of the perspective of Dalí's *Crucifixion* (1954). Two men, who (as we later learn) are associated with Guido's film, grab the rope and pull him down. As he descends, he wakes up—in his bed at the spa hotel. The spa's doctor is giving him a check-up and makes recommendations about the waters he should drink and the mineral baths he should take. As the consultation proceeds, Guido's script collaborator, Daumier (played by the French film critic Jean Rougeul), sits at the side and makes sour comments about the material that the director has given him to read.

Guido then goes into a huge bathroom, shocking us with white when he switches on the neon lights against the checkered tiles. As he looks unenthusiastically at his tired face in the mirror, Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries" (from *Die Walküre* [1870]) comes incongruously to our ears, and with no caesura the camera moves across the huge, real-fantastic gardens of the spa hotel. (An orchestra on the garden bandstand is playing the Wagner piece; soon it switches to Rossini's "The Barber of Seville" [1813].) The camera is now—as it is only rarely in the film—purely subjective; it *is* Guido. Flamboyantly dressed people wave to it as it passes, a nun giggles embarrassedly at it and turns aside. (Fellini loved to tease the clergy, as he does here and in other films of his.)

Next we see long lines of hotel guests waiting in the sun with parasols and umbrellas, advancing toward a bar at which mineral water is dispensed in mugs, moving slowly as with a bridesmaid's hesitation step, almost in time to the music. The camera now observes Guido joining the line. While he is waiting, he suddenly sees a vision, evidently a familiar vision, on the hill behind the mineral springs: a lovely girl (Cardinale) in flowing white, floating down the hillside toward him. Soon she is behind the bar and extends to him a mug of water—recurrently throughout *8½*, this vision offers Guido comfort, tenderness, order—and he stares, happily bemused. A sharp voice jars him, and the film cuts to the face of a real attendant, a scrawny, sweating woman holding out a mug impatiently. And, to underscore Guido's return to reality, his collaborator, Daumier, is waiting with more acerbic comments about his script ideas.

This much of the opening I have followed sequentially, but with dozens of exquisite details omitted, to suggest the texture of the film. It begins in a dream, then glides into waking, then into a vision, then back to reality, as seamlessly as well-modulated music. Even in reality there is a suggestion of dream: when Guido is going to meet his producer in the hotel lobby, for example, his descent in an elevator is staged to recall the opening dream sequence; as it passes each floor, the elevator makes a sound like that of Guido's heartbeat, and the other inhabitants of the car (a cardinal and some assistants) peer at Guido like the people in the tunnel. Arcs of movement like this, the placement of dark and glare throughout, the music of Wagner and Rossini—all combine to give *8½* a pleasurably controlled swirl of excitement, as

each moment flows organically out of the last moment into the next. And, again, this much of the film sets its location for us: it takes place, subjectively, in Guido. Guido's center of self—frightened, chafed, greedy, loving, idealistic, defensive—is where the picture flows, springing from every aspect of his consciousness.

Two pressures are constant on that self. First, there is the impending film to be made; everywhere Guido turns in the real world he is harried—by producer, actors, assistants. Second, there is increasing knowledge of himself; he is undergoing a kind of fortyish climacteric that is exposing some truth about his sexual behavior, his guilts, his ultra-secret caché of glee about his guilt. (At the spa he meets an unwittingly minatory figure: a friend somewhat older than himself who has left his wife for a woman young enough to be his daughter, and who has a glib, even tortuous rationale for his actions. There are other such middle-aged figures in *8½*: Conocchia, the production assistant; Cesarino, the production supervisor; the aging actress who tries to get Guido to pad her role so that she can exploit her waning sex appeal.) And Guido knows that the second pressure, the burden of his past that grows heavier as the interconnections become clearer, is hindering him from dealing with the first pressure, his film. These two forces keep battering at him, alternately and simultaneously, and there is no refuge—except with the girl in white, either in sleep or memory or daydream.

The film's telling imaginative touches nonetheless keep tumbling out, one after another. When his writer quotes one too many pearls of wisdom, the director wearily lifts a finger in command, two bravoes suddenly appear, slip a black hood over the writer's head, and hang him on the spot. When certain nonsense syllables (the magic words "asa nisi masa," a code for *anima*, Italian for soul or spirit) remind Guido of his childhood, we go back to his family's house—as spacious and safe as it seemed to him then—where he and his cousins are treading grapes in a tun, then are washed and carried off to bed in clean sheets in their nurses' arms. There is no point in a catalogue; the effects are many and marvelous. The dreams do not fade out and in: they are part of the fabric. If it takes a moment to decide whether what is happening is dream or not, the confusion is seemingly part of the design. From this coursing and eddying film, I now arbitrarily pluck some sequences to illustrate thematic development.

Soon after his mistress arrives in the resort town and is settled in her hotel, Guido and the fleshly, compliant woman go to bed together. He asks her to play a game with him, to act like a whore, and she lets him paint fierce eyebrows on her. Later he is sleeping next to the woman, who is calmly reading and eating a peach, when we see a well-dressed, elderly lady wiping a wall of the room. This woman, we discover, is Guido's mother, and the wall becomes the marble wall of the mausoleum where his father is buried. The dead father, a well-dressed old gentleman, appears and gently complains that his vault is too small. Then the film producer and an associate come walking toward us through the cemetery, and the father asks them how his son is doing, very much as a parent might ask his child's teachers. Guido, in fact, is now wearing an adult version of what we learn is his schoolboy uniform. The film duo moves off, and Guido helps his father lower himself into an open grave. His mother suddenly kisses Guido's cheek; subsequently, with incongruous passion, she kisses

him full on the mouth. Startled, he pulls his head away—and it is not his mother he is kissing but a beautiful younger woman who, as we once again learn later, is his wife, wearing the mourning hat-and-veil that his mother had on. The dream returns to reality with Guido coming down the corridor of his hotel toward his room, humming the Rossini of the bandstand and wiggling his foot in a little dance.

Guido's sexual encounter with his mistress has summoned up a dream of guilt: toward parental injunction, toward religion as exemplified in his parochial schooling, toward the pressures of his directing job and the need he still feels to please his father. At a deeper discomfiting level, the dream has stirred dark, unconscious links in Guido between mistress and mother, mother and wife. Diagnosis is not Fellini's aim, however: he is not a clinician. He is concerned with the delineation in art of the currents flooding through his protagonist, and he does it with a poetry that is so easy as almost to be matter-of-fact. A particularly neat point is that the return to reality shows how ineffective the dream of guilt has been: Guido comes down the hall in a little dance of triumph. (Every dream or fantasy in *8½* always ends at an advanced point; it never returns, like a mere excursion, to the point at which it began.)

Somewhat later Guido is in the garden of his hotel, speaking with a cardinal who is also staying there, when his eyes are distracted by the heavy legs of a woman coming down that little hill behind the springs. (Again we see the conjunction of religion and sex—with Guido, the one always brings thoughts of the other.) Those heavy legs remind him of other heavy legs. Without dissolve, simply continuing, the film is back in memory with the schoolboy Guido, about twelve or so, in his uniform, going with classmates to a lonely beach and a concrete hut. The boys call out "Saraghina!" and out comes a large, unkempt, wild-looking whore with fierce, painted eyebrows. The boys seat themselves on the ground, throw coins at her, and the fat lady dances for them suggestively. They are clapping hands in wicked ecstasy when some priests arrive from their school. Guido flees down the beach (a moment filmed in speeded-up, silent-comedy style) but is caught and pinned down by two of the priests; and we recall Guido's opening dream in which two men pulled him down to a beach from his soaring escape.

When the boy is disciplined back at the school, his mother is summoned to the meeting, but she is the gray-haired woman of the tomb sequence, much too old to be the mother of this boy. (We have already seen Guido's young mother in an intervening recollection of very early childhood.) The whole Saraghina sequence gives the antecedents for his liking of plump women and painted faces, with further evidence as to why the present-day Guido always intertwines thoughts of sex and the Church; but the Guido of the present is evidently interfering with his memory of the discipline scene. He puts his *older* mother in it—since this is a recollection he can control, not a dream—possibly to suppress any buried sexual connection in his mind, distasteful to him, between his feelings for his lovely, buxom young mother and his impulse toward La Saraghina.

If it can be said that one sequence in the rich fabric of *8½* reveals most about Fellini's view of the relation between art and life, it is the one near the end in a film theater at the resort town. The producer is running some screen tests that have already been shot and insists that Guido make up his mind about casting. In the cavernous

theater are the producer, Guido, and his sleek, chic wife—who continues to be bitter because she arrived to find the mistress nearby and her husband pretending that he doesn't even know the other woman. A few associates and friends are present, too. Guido is still evading decisions because he doesn't know yet know what the film is—is increasingly roiled by his awareness that he doesn't know who *he* is. The tests are run, and we discover through them that Guido has already considered the use of materials from his own life in his film.

These tests are of actors playing some of the "real" people we have already met. No matter how familiar one is with *8½*, it is always a considerable shock to see the mistress, for instance, appear on the screen of that theater in her ermine-trimmed outfit, then turn around and show us a similar but different face, or a Saraghina equally spherical and in the same dirty clothes yet a different woman. The resolution of our peculiar discomfort about this doesn't come until the end of the film when we realize (when Guido realizes) what his creative unconscious has been working toward. And this dislocation of reality-levels is heightened when the girl in white appears—really appears—in that theater. It turns out that she is an actress whom Guido knows and who has come here because he had said he wanted her in his film. He then uses the fact of her arrival as an excuse to go off with her without making the casting decisions he is still unable to make. As they drive away, it is clear that the girl is amiable enough but certainly not the Princess of Tranquility into which his fantasy had transformed her.

The next day the producer orders the press conference, at the steel tower, where Guido must announce his plans. Again the film director fantasizes—escaping decision-making by imagining that he commits suicide. When I first saw *8½* years ago, I thought that the fake suicide and the ending that follows it were palliative, that real suicide—followed by the resolved, happy ending that in reality is itself a fantasy—would have been the logical ending for this artist who thought himself creatively bankrupt. I've seen the film at least a dozen times since then and have seen how right the ending is as filmed. Guido's failure to concoct a plot for a picture is not bankruptcy, not for him, not for this moment in his life. He must go on, to realize in his conscious mind what his unconscious has been trying to tell him: that *he* is the plot. The two pressures that have been on him throughout—the need to make a film and the agony of middle-aged self-realization—flow together to form the conclusion. *8½* thus becomes, as previously noted, the film of *8½* being made; the film that Guido is ultimately inspired to make, or *has* made, is, in fact, the film that we have been watching for 138 minutes.

The final sequence initiates an even more abstract level of meaning that becomes a commentary on the aesthetic of Italian film itself. The entire sequence unfolds before the enormous monolithic structure of the steel tower-cum-launching pad. In front of this structure, a large crowd eventually mills about and the whole image becomes reflective of similar scenes in the great silent epics *Quo Vadis?* (1912, dir. Enrico Guazzoni) and *Cabiria* (1913, dir. Giovanni Pastrone), which represent Italy's first golden era of cinema. During this period, film manifested itself through the monumental, densely populated, and often frenzied form of such epics, as well as in the grim, suffering people and dirty streets of such forerunners of Italian neorealism

as *Sperduti nel buio* (*Lost in the Dark*, 1914; dir. Nino Martoglio), *Assunta Spina* (1915, dir. Gustavo Serena), and *Cenere* (*Ashes*, 1916; dir. Febo Mari). This dichotomy is repeated in *8½* in the artistic struggle Guido has with his producer, who wants him to make an epic, and with himself in his expressed desire to make a picture that tells the unvarnished truth. Fellini resolves this struggle by merging and internalizing both ideas in *8½* to create an epic of the psyche that adequately encompasses gritty realism in the scenes of Guido's childhood.

On this broad aesthetic level, *8½* is the journey of Italian cinema backward to re-establish its roots in the silent period and, forward, to regain the inspiration to create a new direction for films of the future. What, on a biographical level, had been an re-examination of Guido's childhood, becomes, at this extreme, a history of Italian cinema as it returns through neorealism and "white telephone" movies (the term applied to trivial romantic comedies set in blatantly artificial studio surroundings symbolized by the ever-present white telephone) to its beginnings, its golden era when experimental approaches to film form were daring and innovative. Fellini is thus clearing the stage for a new kind of film represented by *8½* and its successor, *Juliet of the Spirits*: an intertwining of reality and spectacle that is at the same time an internal projection of the mind, imagination, and emotion of its director, and which liberated filmmakers everywhere in the 1960s from the conventions of time, place, and mode of experience that had prevailed in the cinema for decades.

To get back to the ending of the *8½* itself, as workers are dismantling the huge steel tower-cum-launching pad after the press conference, Guido sits in his car with his screenwriter, Daumier. The latter, in his unbearably logical way, tells Guido that he is right not to make a film, that artists must stop creating when they have nothing to say—indeed, that the imperative for all artists these days is silence. Outside the car appears a man from a mind-reading act who, in a previous scene, had provided Guido with a link to his past. The appearance of that man, together with Daumier's pronunciation of the word "silence," is Guido's command at last to himself. The explosion occurs in him: an interior voice drowns out the film critic and bids the director to express himself in continued presentations, even though he has no thesis to promulgate and can't even resolve his own personal confusion. The way now clear, Guido's creative powers surge back and he is ready to begin the film that is *8½*. Put another way, the end of the film is also its beginning.

As sunset begins to darken the great open field and as the circus march is heard, the last fantasy is enacted, a kind of pure vision that states Guido's resolution and that prophesies the film he will make. The curtains on what remains of the steel tower part, and down the steps of the abandoned movie set comes the large crowd of people, all the persons of his past and present whom we have met, all talking to one another, all dressed in white—as if sanctified now by his acceptance of them, his realization of what he must do. Guido, whom we have seen as a ringmaster in a previous fantasy sequence, now is the ringmaster of his life as he asks all these people to parade around a circus ring. Then he takes his wife's hand—she gives it willingly—and they join the circle.

Film, *8½* in this way implies, is only honest when it is non-dramatic and anti-rhetorical: that is to say, when it seems neither to have interfered with the flow of life

nor to have reduced it to statements or "messages." Hence Fellini presents an ending that is no conclusion but rather a literal parade of the human elements that have comprised Guido's life. What we are witnessing, then, is the enactment of a vision that holds that art resembles a chemical rather than an intellectual solution, with life's components remaining in suspension. Guido himself has been seeking freedom not only from the limitations of duty and monogamy but also from the neatness of form that would falsify the inchoate grandeur of content. The last sequence announces that neither Guido nor Fellini will ever escape such stresses, except through the art of film, whose power of inclusion is greater than any yet devised.

As light gradually diminishes and night falls, the accompanying orchestra is the last to walk off-screen and we are left only with the figures of Guido as a little schoolboy, in a white version of his uniform, and four clown-musicians. The lights and the music then fade further to the boy alone in a spotlight, playing a flute. At last that light and the piping fade, too, as the boy finally leaves and darkness takes over. The show—the showing, really—itself is over, the screen has gone to black; yet the light of art, of Fellini's art, persists.

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*Taxi Tehran* (2015), directed by Jafar Panahi

## Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's *Memories of Underdevelopment*



Marxist aesthetics has, at its best, been better than most Marxist art. From the beginning Marx and Engels had ideas on the subject that subsequently have usually been ignored. Engels told a novelist that he was not at fault for failing to write "an authentic Socialist novel": "That is not at all what I meant. The more carefully concealed the author's opinions are, the better it is for a work of art" (Beyer, 98). More positively, Marx wrote to Ferdinand Lassalle about the latter's only play, a tragedy titled *Franz von Sickingen* (1859), that he "ought to have allowed the heroes of his tragedy the possibility of being faithful to their own selves, of testing their capabilities to the very limit, of exploring the internal, organic dialectics of their own personalities" (Arvon, 37).

Despite the fact that he was from Communist Cuba, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea himself appeared to splendidly satisfy the above injunctions, making only the movies he wanted to make and retaining complete artistic control over them. At once his country's foremost director and a committed believer in the Communist revolution,

Gutiérrez Alea nonetheless frequently used his films either to satirize the flaws and stupidities of Castro's regime or to treat sympathetically those Cubans who had been marginalized by their own government. *Death of a Bureaucrat* (1966), for instance, darkly ridicules the Kafkaesque bureaucracy of post-revolutionary Cuba, while *Memories of Underdevelopment* (1968) explores the soul-searching alienation of a bourgeois intellectual who chooses to remain in Castro-country, in the midst of revolutionary fervor, rather than flee his beloved Havana for Miami. *Guantánamera* (1995), for its part, is a black comedy that follows one family's attempts to transport a corpse from Guantánamo to Havana during a time of acute gasoline shortages; whereas *Strawberry and Chocolate* (1994), though not without its comic moments, is essentially a serious, compassionate consideration of homosexual life—and heterosexual response to that life—in a country not known for its tolerance of "alternative lifestyles."

From 1971 to 1976, however, Gutiérrez Alea did not make any feature films, and there were rumors that, though he was no political dissident and was an early and devoted supporter of Fidel Castro, he had been silenced—even imprisoned—by the Castro regime for ideological reasons. Was he being punished for having lost sight of the primary goal of Cuba's revolutionary filmmakers, which was to decolonize the taste of the Cuban film-going public, for decades subjected to standard Hollywood fare? Gutiérrez Alea's *A Cuban Struggles Against the Demons* was made in 1970, just before the drought, and he himself called it "very confused because it is too overladen with various layers of meaning, and with excessively difficult metaphors" (Burton, 122). What a familiar smack of party-dictated recantation in that line. Gutiérrez Alea's first film after his "period of instability," *The Last Supper*, released in 1977, gave substance to the rumors about his silence: it is very *un*confused, too overladen with various layers of banality and with excessively transparent metaphors.

Completely contravening Gutiérrez Alea's best film, *Memories of Underdevelopment*, as well as the aforementioned precepts of Marx and Engels, *The Last Supper* is a belabored, ineffectual allegory of the tyranny of Christian liberalism and the historical necessity for a socialist Cuba. If *Memories* revived somewhat the idea of extension of consciousness through political change, *The Last Supper* proves yet again that the Marxist state, once changed, loses interest in change and becomes interested only in confirmation. And in lying: in repeating *ad nauseam* the lie that the deplorable deceits and tyrannies and egocentricities of rampant capitalism will disappear in a Marxist state, when, as a matter of too easily cited horrible history, they are merely metamorphosed into different channels under different names and are often aggravated.

Communist films are at their best, obviously, when filmmakers of talent choose subjects that can be explored to their fullest and developed in ultimate subtlety without abrading the dicta of the state. Such a film is *Memories of Underdevelopment*, my subject here. It was Gutiérrez Alea's fourth film, produced after *Stories from the Revolution* (1960), *The Twelve Chairs* (1962), *Cumbite* (1964), and *Death of a Bureaucrat*. The first of the post-revolutionary Cuban features to be admitted into the United States (in 1973), *Memories* remains the Cuban cinema's one great international success. It was to have been shown in a festival of Cuban films in New

York in 1971, but the U.S. Treasury Department intervened because of "licensing irregularities" and the festival was canceled. Then, in 1974, the State Department itself refused to grant Gutiérrez Alea a visa to attend the awards ceremony of the National Society of Film Critics, at which he was due to receive a special prize for *Memories*.

First, let it be said that *Memories of Underdevelopment* is an extraordinarily sensitive piece of work, made with tactful, confident skill that proves itself through reticence. The film reveals the influence in tempo and introspection of Michelangelo Antonioni—not exactly an exemplar of Marxist vigor. Like the Hungarian picture *Love* (1970, dir. Károly Makk), *Memories* is one of those complex, self-questioning movies that occasionally come from police states in their periods of planned relaxation. The triumph of that police state—of Castro's Communist revolution in 1959—was followed by immediate and sweeping reforms in the Cuban film industry, which by then was producing little but pornography. The Cuban Institute of Cinematic Art (Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficos, or ICAIC)— of which Gutiérrez Alea was a founding member—confiscated foreign production and distribution agencies, then took charge of every aspect of the Cuban film industry from production to exhibition, including import and export, publicity, and archives. New and well-equipped studios were built, and production teams were trained in crash courses by Czech technicians. Castro's regime, like that of the Soviet Union before it, had always had great faith in the cinema as an instructional and agitational tool (all the more potent in a country with much illiteracy). But the result, in the case of *Memories*, is the very opposite of the gung-ho stuff one might expect from a newly organized Communist government: a non-propagandist, non-caricatured film about a non-revolutionary, produced by a country whose own slogan-bred revolution was less than ten years old.

Based on the 1962 novel *Inconsolable Memories*, by the Cuban writer Edmundo Desnoes, *Memories of Underdevelopment* provides a witty and intricate insider's view of the Cuban revolution, within a time frame that spans the two most precarious moments of its history: the Bay of Pigs invasion of April 1961 and the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962. Sergio, a former furniture-store owner in his late thirties, now living off indemnifications from the government (for property he owned that was confiscated), reflects upon his life, his loves, and his ambivalent detachment from the social transformations that surge around him. Like the "superfluous man" of nineteenth-century Russian literature, he longs to be caught up in some great cause but, disabled by his parasitic conditioning and self-absorption, does not know what role he can play in the shabby and noisy yet vigorous new Cuba. Neither a revolutionary nor a counter-revolutionary, Sergio would like to be writer, which he perceives as a vocation outside the realm of political imperative. Idly observing the revolution from a safe distance—through a telescope—in a penthouse atop one of Havana's tallest buildings (in the well-appointed district of Vedado), Sergio chooses, however, merely to write in his diary and toy with erotic daydreams.

Before retreating to his penthouse, he bids goodbye to his parents, his wife, Laura, and later his friend Pablo, but a certain critical "curiosity" (as he describes it) keeps him from following them to Miami. When he returns home, he remembers

(with the aid of a tape recorder) his quarrels with Laura, and we also see flashback fragments of Sergio's relationship with Hanna, his German-born first love; he fantasizes an affair with his pretty Protestant maid, Noemí; he plays at writing; he watches the city from the telescope on his terrace; and he waits. Taller than most Cuban men and with features more European, Sergio has also always been more "European" in temperament and interest, has always felt equivocal shame and pity toward Cuba; now he feels hopeless about, yet fascinated by, the revolution. Will this island ever get over its (to him) congenital underdevelopment?

Bored and sexy, he picks up a girl one day, a would-be actress from the working class named Elena, and has a brief but complicated involvement with her. He tries to "Europeanize" this young woman with visits to museums and a trip to Hemingway's former home—a sharp, double-edged sequence that touches on the social role or conscience of the artist, the necessary death of the old kind of writer, however esteemed, in the face of a new society. Uncertain of her position with Sergio and even frightened by him, Elena tells her parents that he raped her. He is tried—and acquitted. By now it is 1962, the time of the Missile Crisis. Sergio goes back to his terrace: to wait, to watch, to wonder. In the final sequence, big guns rattle by at dawn while Sergio lies in bed, immobile and disinterested.

A series of documentary and semi-documentary sequences persistently interrupts this already discontinuous narrative line. Apparently disconnected, irrelevant, and dissonant, these sequences (including one concerning the excesses of Batista's brutal regime) in fact function as a kind of commentary that puts Sergio's attitudes and experiences into perspective. Though the protagonist views the world around him through eyes dim with bafflement, skepticism, and narcissism, Gutiérrez Alea's fictional documentary or docudrama as a whole offers a view of the early years of the Cuban revolution of unparalleled complexity and insight. The self and society, private life and public history, individual psychology and historical sociology—this, then, is the core of *Memories of Underdevelopment*, and film has rarely (if ever) been used so effectively to portray such a relationship. Put another way, it is the dialectic of consciousness and context—Sergio's experiences, feelings, and thoughts as they are confronted by the new reality of Cuba—that forms the basis of *Memories*.

Visually, the film's dialectic is presented through the use of the three aforementioned forms of cinematic structure: documentary, semi-documentary, and fictional footage. Documentary or newsreel footage and semi-documentary scenes are used to depict the Durkheimian "collective consciousness" of the revolutionary process, a consciousness that is preeminently historical. This material presents us with the background of the Cuban revolution and establishes the context of the picture's fictional present, by placing it between the 1961 exodus in the aftermath of the failed Bay of Pigs invasion and the defensive preparations for the Missile Crisis of 1962. The majority of the fictional sequences are presented in the traditional form of narrative cinema, in which the camera functions as omniscient narrator. However, at times the camera offers us Sergio's point of view, the way in which his consciousness realizes itself through his forms of perception—*what* he looks at, that is, and how he sees it. One is made to identify with Sergio both when the (omniscient) camera dwells on him and when it conveys his subjective recollections or adopts his point of view.

Thus the film creates an identification with what it is simultaneously criticizing. We sympathize with and understand Sergio, who is capable of moments of lucidity. However, we are also made to understand that his perspective is neither universal nor timeless but instead a specific response to a particular situation.

Sergio's way of seeing was formed in pre-revolutionary Cuba. As a member of the educated elite, he developed a disdain for Cuban reality and a scorn for those who believe that it can be changed. Critical of his bourgeois family and friends (who are nevertheless capable of making the commitment to leave Cuba), he is unable to overcome his own alienation and link himself to the revolution. The ultimate outsider, Sergio attempts to content himself by colonizing and exploiting women—a metaphor for the Euro-American colonization of Cuba. Indeed, his only real field of action consists of the women whom he objectifies and tries to transform according to borrowed (European) criteria. He condemns Ernest Hemingway for the way he molded his Afro-Cuban servant to his needs, but he fails to realize how the same criterion should be applied to his own persistent cultural and sexual appropriation of the women in his life.

*Memories of Underdevelopment* opens with scenes of a street carnival. Through the credits one sees dancing couples—detached yet absorbed—gyrating to the insistent beat of Afro-Cuban drums. This "typical" scene, virtually *de rigueur* in movies made in Cuba throughout the country's pre-revolutionary cinematic history, is here filmed in highly atypical style, as a handheld camera darts back and forth through the crowd more like a participant than a spectator. Shots suddenly ring out. A man lies prostrate. On the pavement, a shiny substance catches the light. Anxious onlookers block the view. A man flees, instantly swallowed up by the crowd. The inert body is hoisted high and carried away. The dancing continues, but the camera fixes on the glistening face of one black woman who stares back—arch, intent, challenging. A freeze-frame concludes the credits.

In a matter of seconds, then, a stereotypical view of Cuban life has been revived, only to have its illusion of exoticism and obliviousness shattered by unexpected, unidentified violence. What has been established, in fact, is the tension between past and present, archetype and reality, pre-revolutionary dailiness and indiscriminate, counter-revolutionary violence. The participant-spectators resume their dancing, but the camera intervenes to freeze the action like an exclamation point at the end of a sentence. Members of the film audience, non-participatory spectators at the outset, are thereby challenged to consider their own role in regard to the film that is about to unfold. What follows continues to startle, to provoke, and to challenge its audience.

The first four sequences of *Memories of Underdevelopment* alternate subjective and objective camera styles, setting up the tension that will continue throughout the film. The aggressive camera and quick cutting of the credit sequence give way to a more restrained, *cinéma-vérité* style in the airport scene, where Sergio bids goodbye to his family. The flashback on the returning bus reviews the airport farewells from Sergio's point of view, but they are paradoxically less "subjective" than the earlier shots from his relatives' perspective because of Sergio's insensitivity and nonchalance. In the third sequence, the camera alternates between the protagonist's point of view as he surveys his apartment and, later, the city below, and a more

"objective" shot, which includes him in the frame. The viewer is distanced from Sergio here by his obvious boredom and detachment: his yawns and even belches do not exactly stimulate audience identification.

Humor—with Sergio as agent (ceremoniously tossing a dead bird over the balcony, twisting Castro's triumphal phrase about the Cuban people on the move) or victim (collapsing onto a wooden hanger)—again brings him closer to us. But when he switches to poetic diction, he creates distance once more. The telescope that Sergio uses to safely survey the city below itself is a visual metaphor for his distance from his fellow Cubans. Though "seen" through Sergio's eyes, the poignant individuality of the faces glimpsed on the Havana street in the fourth sequence calls the reliability of his perception and perspective into question. Such techniques persist throughout the film, establishing a dynamic and multi-level relationship between viewer and protagonist that is primarily a function of the camera's careful regulation of point of view.

Complementary and sometimes conflicting elements of Sergio's personality are embodied in the very people who share his life. Of the four women among them, Laura, his wife, represents the Euro-Americanization of the Cuban bourgeoisie. Sergio has transformed her from a "slovenly Cuban girl" into a woman of elegant exterior, as artificial and empty as the cosmetics on her dressing table or the gowns left behind in her closet. He rummages through his wife's abandoned belongings, trying on her furs and manhandling, so to speak, the icons of her femininity—a powder puff, pearls, lipstick. Sergio then sits down with the lipstick in front of a mirror and proceeds to doodle with it. He scribbles on the mirror not so much to interfere with its reflection as to put, rather narcissistically, the finishing touches on his own self-portrait. Finally, he takes one of Laura's stockings and pulls it over his head, in a telling distortion of his own features, as he listens to the tape recording of a conversation in which he and his wife are arguing, first about a movie they have seen, then, as he taunts her, about Laura's attempts to disguise her vulgar origins with all the commodities women are offered for the construction of their glamorous image.

Hanna, in contrast to Laura, is a natural blonde who represents the real thing rather than an imitation. A Jewess who fled Germany with her family during World War II, she finished her schooling in Cuba, where she became, for Sergio, "the best thing that ever happened in my life." Though continuing to idolize Hanna as the ideal woman, he nevertheless let her slip through his fingers—postponing their marriage and his literary career for the sake of his furniture store. Material aspirations, then, not romantic obstacles, were responsible for Sergio's loss of his "one true love."

Elena, for her part, may be from the working class but she is clearly not a "new Cuban woman." She aspires to be an actress so that she can "unfold her personality," and she longs for luxurious goods from the United States, but she resists the European mold into which Sergio tries to fit her. Elena has her own vitality—one that Sergio dismisses as hopeless inconsistency, a symptom of his country's underdevelopment. In contrast to her, Noemí, who represents the rural proletariat, is made exotic for Sergio by her Protestant religious beliefs but in the end remains purely an object of fantasy. The disparity between reality and Sergio's elaboration of it is always too great, as indicated in this case by the contrast between Noemí's baptism ceremony, as

perceived in his erotic imagination, and the documented reality of the baptismal photographs that she brings him.

Pablo, the protagonist's one male friend, represents everything in his past life that Sergio now actively rejects. Pablo is small-minded, crude, self-deluding, and self-righteously "apolitical." Sergio, on his second trip to the airport, watches Pablo and his wife leave with relief, as if he had regurgitated them, or so he comments in voice-over. Again in voice-over, Sergio speculates that, although it may mean his own demise, the revolution is his revenge against the stupid Cuban bourgeoisie and against idiots like Pablo. As they part, the latter signals to his friend through a glass partition, gesticulating dramatically and mouthing words that Sergio cannot or will not comprehend. Looking at Pablo, Sergio sees himself in the glass, but it is a self that he now consciously rejects. From this point on, these two belong to different worlds, and there can no longer be any communication between them.

Each of Sergio's personal relationships sheds light on his concept of underdevelopment. For him, "culture" and "civilization" are synonymous with economic and technological development. Further, he rejects Cuban cultural forms in favor of the more "cosmopolitan" tradition of Europe and the United States. Hanna is the woman of his dreams because she belongs to this world, but Sergio settles for Laura, whom he successfully molds into a Third World imitation of "first world" elegance. Laura, however, abandons her husband for the very comforts of the developed world that he has taught her to appreciate. Unlike his wife, parents, and Pablo, Sergio does not choose permanent residence in the U.S. when the opportunity arises but instead remains behind in Cuba because, despite his social class and cultural bias, he feels a certain bond to the fate of his small but determined island homeland. The decision to stay notwithstanding, Sergio retains his former assumptions and continues trying to live "like a European," shepherding Elena around to museums and bookstores and eventually ditching her when she fails to let herself be "developed" according to his formula.

This, then, is Sergio's subjective world as *Memories of Underdevelopment* presents it—part of which he rejects, part of which he cannot or will not escape. It is, basically, the world that Desnoes portrays in the novel. The film adds a new dimension, placing Sergio in his historical context through its extensive use of documentary and semi-documentary footage of both contemporary and past events. That is, Gutiérrez Alea's film "objectifies" the novel's internal monologue by Sergio, criticizing and contextualizing his psychological subjectivism and confronting his attempts to retreat into his pre-revolutionary psychology, as well as his pre-revolutionary ways of seeing, with the "fact of history" as presented in documentary images of the revolution taking place in his country.

There is a remarkable variety to these sequences. Montages of still photos in the style of the Cuban film documentarian Santiago Álvarez are inserted at several points: when Sergio reflects on hunger in pre-revolutionary Cuba and in all of Latin America; when he recalls the humble origins of the late Hemingway's faithful Cuban servant; when the Soviet tourists at the Hemingway residence, now a museum, thumb through the novelist's photographic mementos of the Spanish Civil War. There is television footage of Marilyn Monroe, of American soldiers at Guantánamo Naval Base, of

blacks being beaten in the heyday of the American civil rights movement, and, finally, of Fidel Castro's speech reaffirming Cuba's autonomy and resistance in the face of John F. Kennedy's nuclear threats. At one point, the camera even peruses a newspaper from headline to comic strip. Sequences at the José Martí Airport, at a swimming pool, along Havana's streets, and in the Hemingway museum themselves are recognizably "real" rather than reconstructed for the film. The actors insert themselves into these sequences or situations in such a way as to interact with, and against, a natural background.

The resonances among the documentary, semi-documentary, and fictional sequences are what make *Memories of Underdevelopment* such a thought-provoking and fertile film. Through this interaction among the different sequences, and often as a function of dramatic irony, the vision of the picture not only exceeds that of its protagonist but also often undermines or contradicts it. Sergio, for example, reads aloud a Marxist analysis of the fallacies of bourgeois morality as evidenced by the Bay of Pigs invaders, and, as he does so (like a newsreel commentator), the film offers a visual rendering of that analysis: we see a newsreel of the invasion; the captured mercenaries being marched along, hands on head; and the interrogation of forty of these prisoners by a panel of journalists, in a packed Havana theater, just a few days after their defeat. The impact of such a visual rendering is to demonstrate that actions, not intentions or rationales, are the final arbiter of an individual's social role and ideological stance. Though Sergio intellectually grasps this point, he fails to connect it with his own life in any way. He fails to realize that he, too, is an accomplice of reactionary forces, precisely because he will not abandon his position of critical superiority to participate, to act, in the world around him, to engage with it in a political manner and thereby recover the dialectical relationship between individual and group.

One semi-documentary sequence adds a special note of self-reflectiveness and self-criticism to *Memories of Underdevelopment*. Sergio attends a roundtable discussion on "Literature and Underdevelopment" (an event that actually took place in 1964). Among the participants (the Haitian poet René Depestre, the Italian novelist Gianni Toti, the Argentinian novelist David Viñas), as the representative of Cuban letters, is the novelist Edmundo Desnoes himself. As he pontificates on the racial prejudice directed not only toward blacks but also Latin Americans in the United States, the camera, first in medium and then in long shot, underlines the fact that Desnoes and the rest of the panel are being served by a black attendant who fills their water glasses—completely unacknowledged by them.

Desnoes, together with the rest of the panelists, exposes himself to further criticism, even ridicule, when a member of the audience (Jack Gelber, a New York playwright and author of *The Cuban Thing* [1968]) interrupts the proceedings to criticize—in English—this "sterile and impotent form of discussion" as inappropriate to a revolutionary society. The planes of "reality" and "fiction" are further mixed when Sergio, whom the editing identifies with Desnoes, leaves the scene profoundly troubled. He confesses his lack of understanding, slowly advancing toward the camera, saying that the American was right, that words devour words and leave one, finally, in the clouds. The graininess and increasing

closeness of the shot here cause Sergio to appear to disintegrate as he muses, "Now it begins, Sergio, your final destruction."

Such critical self-reflectiveness in the film is not confined to the appearance of Desnoes. When Sergio takes Elena to the Cuban film institute, the "friend" to whom he had promised to introduce her turns out to be Gutiérrez Alea, appearing as himself. The transition from the restaurant where Sergio picks up Elena to the film studio is nothing short of brilliant. Elena says that she wants to be an actress so that she can be someone else without its being thought that she is crazy. Sergio answers that actresses, like broken records, only repeat the same lines and movements over and over again. The ensuing shots—cyclically repeated scenes of female nudity and not-quite-culminated sexual contact—are revealed, when the lights come on, to be film fragments within the film *Memories of Underdevelopment*: a collection of erotic clips that Fulgencio Batista's censors, always obsessed with keeping up appearances, found "offensive to morals and good breeding." As the two men and one woman walk out of the screening room, Sergio asks Gutiérrez Alea what he plans to do with the film clips. The director replies that he intends to use them in "a sort of collage, a film that will have a bit of everything." The viewer discovers that Sergio's doubts over whether the revolutionary government will release such a picture are ultimately unfounded, since the film described in this conversation is precisely the one that the audience is watching.

This sequence is a kind of crossroads in *Memories*, a high point of ironic humor and technical virtuosity that also reveals self-deceptive attitudes toward sexuality. What has been shown, after all, is the same kind of hypocritical sexual elusiveness and game-playing in which Elena herself is about to engage with Sergio. Simultaneously, the sequence takes masterly advantage of the camera's ability to reduplicate action, transcend space, and ignore time. It totally confuses the planes of fiction and documentary truth, which remain more clearly separate in the rest of the film; undercuts the entire question of censorship; and, most important, allows the film's director in person to present his audience with a major key to understanding the picture he has made. Indeed, *Memories of Underdevelopment* is a cinematographic collage, not only in its variety and scope, technical eclecticism and visual juxtaposition of evidence from real life and film fiction, but also in its effect—in the way the combination of the fictional and the documentary, "artifice" and "reality," exceeds and transcends the sum of both parts. Finally, as a key to the self-reflectiveness of the film as a whole and the purpose behind it, this sequence postulates an alternative to Sergio—that of Gutiérrez Alea himself, a bourgeois artist who has turned his energies, and the skills that are a product of his former privilege, toward creating a complex, uncompromising work of art from a perspective of political commitment.

*Memories of Underdevelopment* continues to engage the sympathies and admiration particularly of American critics, not only because its protagonist is wry and urbane, because its style is sophisticated and intelligent, but also, and perhaps most tellingly, because it is viewed as an expression of the artist's doubts and ambivalences about the Cuban revolution. Ambivalence, detachment, distance, equivocation: these familiar motifs of political and cultural alienation recur in

countless American writings about Gutiérrez Alea's film. Yet for many North American critics, Sergio's impassioned denunciation of pre-revolutionary Cuba itself goes either unperceived or unexamined.

*Memories of Underdevelopment* poses not simply one social critique, then, but several overlapping ones. Sergio is critical of what he sees around him in the present, and behind him in the past, but he increasingly rejects his own analyses—thus casting doubt upon his status as a commentator. Through its documentary counterpoint, the film often steps back from its protagonist and offers a critical perspective on him that is independent of his own point of view. And in the sequences in which Edmundo Desnoes and Gutiérrez Alea themselves appear, *Memories* also becomes self-critical. Through its identification and distancing devices as well as its fictional and documentary sequences, moreover, the picture works to break down the dependency of the viewer on narrative structures that isolate the individual from the group, and it works to discourage the viewer from selective, hence limited perception. The challenge posed to the viewer is to perceive the completeness of *Memories*: its integration of diverse, even contradictory components into a unified aesthetic whole. Faced with the persistent dilemma of the politicized artist—either to portray the actions and interactions of history or to penetrate the individual psyche—Gutiérrez Alea refuses the choice, positing instead the dialectical interaction of historical circumstance and personal consciousness.

As a work of performance, *Memories of Underdevelopment* rests, finally, on the vision and exploration of personal or individual consciousness, on Sergio's character and the casting of Sergio Corrieri in the role. Corrieri's face and manner fix the delicacy, the intelligence, the faded strength, the stubborn curiosity that are needed. To put the matter in shorthand, what the film gives us is an Antonioni character in the middle of a political revolution, a man who comes out of 100 years of cultivation-as-refuge and now faces profound changes that may alter the reason for that refuge, as well as the refuge itself. Sergio is an anachronism who lives in quasi-fear that he may turn out *not* to be an anachronism, who has only a shaky faith in the revolution that may make him, and people like him, obsolescent.

Sergio's own fate is finally and paradoxically irrelevant, however, for as *Memories* ends the camera moves out from his individual vision to the larger world—and the revolution—beyond. The closing section of the film shows Sergio's ultimate self-paralysis as the city around him prepares for the playing out of the Missile Crisis. History in this way becomes a concrete, material process that, ironically, will be the salvation of all the uncommitted, insubstantial Sergios of Cuba. There is no alternative to the present and coming change in the country, says *Memories of Underdevelopment*, but will this finally change the alternatives for all Cubans, and for Sergio in particular? Out of a revolution bred on slogans came a film without answers: thus lending some credibility to the revolution, at least for the time being.

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*Strawberry and Chocolate* (1994), directed by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea

*Madagascar* (1994), directed by Fernando Pérez

*Guantánamera* (1995), directed by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea

*Bitter Sugar* (1996), directed by Leon Ichaso

*Vertical Love* (1997), directed by Arturo Sotto Díaz

*Life Is to Whistle* (1998), directed by Fernando Pérez

*Waiting List* (2000), directed by Juan Carlos Tabío

*Honey for Oshún* (2001), directed by Humberto Solás

*Todo por ella* (2002), directed by Pavel Giroud

*Red Cockroaches* (2003), directed by Miguel Coyula

*Suite Habana* (2003), directed by Fernando Pérez

*Viva Cuba* (2005), directed by Juan Carlos Cremata & Iraida Malberti Cabrera

*Havana Blues* (2005), directed by Benito Zambrano

*A King in Havana* (2005), directed by Alexis Valdés

*Cercanía* (2008), directed by Rolando Díaz

# Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*



Francis Ford Coppola has an artistic problem: he is not a thinker. Indeed, Coppola has always been short on thought; he stumbles when he thinks, when he thinks he's thinking. *The Godfather* (1972, 1974, 1990) was strongest in its execution—also its executions—not in its adolescent implications of analogy between the Mafia and corporate capitalism (an analogy that ignores, among other things, the Sicilian origins of the Mafia and its blood bonds of loyalty, which have nothing to do with capitalism). *The Conversation* (1974) itself faltered in its Orwellian idea-structure.

Oddly, the little-known *The Rain People* (1969), a road picture about a young woman's journey toward self-discovery, may be Coppola's most fully realized if least spectacular film. It is more successful artistically than his films to follow because it is filled, not with thought or the attempt at thinking, not with gaps in an ideational framework, but with feeling. And, second, Coppola seems to have produced this movie out of felt or at least imagined experience, as opposed to the indirect kind: his *ideas* about the experience of the Mafia and the Vietnam War in America (seen on display again, after *The Godfather* [I, II] and *Apocalypse Now* [1979], in *The Cotton Club* [1984] and *Gardens of Stone* [1987]), as well as about the experience, chronicled in *The Conversation*, of electronic-surveillance work in the post-Watergate

era. With subject matter a few years ahead of its time, *The Rain People* was thus the work of a man who had looked at (or seen through), as well as lived in, the world, and who has since seemed content primarily to expound upon it.

Even Coppola's scripts for others have suffered from woolly thinking: his screenplay for Jack Clayton's *The Great Gatsby* (1974), for example, turned F. Scott Fitzgerald's supple suggestiveness into mindless blatancy; and his scenario for Franklin Schaffner's *Patton* (1970) presented the glaringly contradictory nature of this famous general as praiseworthy, even fathomless, complexity. That's the top of the heap. From there, we head down to Coppola's blotchy script for René Clément's *Is Paris Burning?* (1966), a rambling, pseudo-documentary re-creation of the liberation of Paris from Nazi occupation. Then we get to the adaptations of Tennessee Williams' *This Property Is Condemned* and Carson McCullers' *Reflections in a Golden Eye*, for Sydney Pollack (1966) and John Huston (1967) respectively, in which Coppola—who began his career in the early 1960s as a director of short sex films—manages to denude the world of Southern Gothicism of all but its trash, its kinkiness, and its pretense.

In *Apocalypse Now*, Coppola's attempts to dramatize private moral agony and general moral abyss during the Vietnam War were disjointed, assumptive, and weak, for all of Vittorio Storaro's aptly hallucinogenic color cinematography. When I read, three years before the making of this film, that Storaro had been chosen as the cinematographer, I have to say I was shocked. The lush *Vogue*-style photographer of Bernardo Bertolucci's *Last Tango in Paris* (1972) and *The Conformist* (1970), for a picture that was being billed as the definitive epic about Vietnam! But, as it turns out, the fine moments in *Apocalypse Now* depend heavily on what Storaro can do for them.

Because Apocalypse Now, despite its director's claims for its moral stature, despite its simplistic relation to Joseph Conrad's novella Heart of Darkness (1899)—on which Coppola and John Milius's screenplay is overtly modeled (though it also has something in common with Werner Herzog's *Aguirre: The Wrath of God* [1972])—is at its best in delivering the texture of the first freaked-out, pill-popping, rock-accompanied war. For the American forces, Vietnam seems to have been divided pretty much between military virtuosi, grateful for any chance to exercise their skills, and most of the troops, who never believed in anything except the possibility of being killed, who were tormented by fear and pointlessness into rank barbarities and new pits of racism. Pinched between a growing anti-war movement at home and an unwinnable war in front of them, these soldiers suffered; and their suffering was often transmuted into gross slaughter, into heavy drugging, into hysterical hilarity set to music. It's this wild psychedelic war, much more a jungle discotheque with butchery than face-in-the-mud naturalism, that Coppola understands and renders well. And for this splashy fantasy on a war that was hideously fantastic, Storaro's boutique eye is perfect.

In London I was once interviewed for a BBC program about Vietnam films, and I was asked about the effect of TV coverage on the making of fictional movies about Vietnam. I forget what I answered, but I remembered the question during *Apocalypse Now*, which I didn't see until I came home. The film libraries are full of newsreel

footage of this century's bloodshed, but Vietnam was the first living-room war (in Michael Arlen's phrase from 1969). I think that Coppola, together with his co-scenarist John Milius, anticipated the BBC question and decided that the picture had to be something other in texture than representation, had to lift past what television had made familiar. This is a trip film, an acid war. Again, Storaro was the right choice to shoot it.

Everything in the picture that tends toward this aim is superb. A devastating helicopter attack on a Viet Cong village at a delta, in which the planes broadcast both "The Ride of the Valkyries" (from Richard Wagner's *Die Walküre* [1870]) and napalm, after which some of the victors go surfing, after which one helicopter drops a river patrol boat into position for a journey upstream; a stop at a depot upcountry that is like a shopping mall misplaced; a sudden encounter up that river with a USO girlie revue (featuring *Playboy* bunnies) in a huge amphitheater surrounded by giant phallic missiles—a performance that ends in an attempt at mass rape; a lighted bridge that looks like a misplaced festival float; the boat crew's nervous destruction of a family on a sampan; the arrival of the patrol boat at its destination, a temple deep in the jungle, gliding in between canoes filled with hundreds of silent, carefully observant, white-daubed natives in a scene that marries the archetypal jungle-princess movie to the Babylon sequence in D. W. Griffith's *Intolerance* (1916)—these scenes, and more like them, show Coppola at his height. He likes size, and he can use it. Of course one can argue that other American directors, given tens of millions of dollars to burn, might also produce moments of sweep and flourish, and Coppola surely couldn't have done it without money. But, in this regard at least, he uses the money well, to give himself the orchestrated crowds, the immense vistas, the stunning juxtapositions that lie aptly within his talent, his apparent sense, on display as never before (or since) in *Apocalypse Now*, that the world is seen most truthfully when it is seen as spectacle.

The very first sequence itself is discouraging, however. In Vietnam in 1968, the protagonist, an army intelligence captain named Benjamin L. Willard, is seen close-up and upside down, then bits and pieces of his dingy, sepia-toned Saigon hotel room are filtered in, like a record-album-cover montage. He's sweat-bathed, drunk, and drinking; he smashes a mirror with his fist. There are panning shots of his dog tag, a pile of bills, his wallet, a woman's picture, an opened letter and envelope, cigarettes, a glass and liquor bottle, and a gun lying next to his pillow. Willard then starts his voice-over narration, which was written by the former war correspondent Michael Herr (author of the admirable *Dispatches* [1977]) and is surprisingly flatulent. The symbols of disorder are stale. Any union in anguish between him and us is thus missed from the start; from that point on, Willard's moral pilgrimage is fabricated while his physical pilgrimage is vivid. (It must be said, though, that the opening dissolves and superimpositions of Willard's face over a rotating ceiling fan and a helicopter attack demonstrate one advantage of Coppola's video editing system, which enabled him to transfer footage to videotape, edit the tape, and then conform the 70mm print of the film to the edited tape. On the video editing machine of this period, the filmmaker could easily build up the visual image in layers, thereby

avoiding use of the expensive, time-consuming optical printer and the film lab normally needed to achieve such superimpositions and dissolves.)

Willard is subsequently ordered, by two grim military superiors and a CIA operative, to make his way upriver to the station of a brilliant Green Beret colonel gone AWOL named Walter E. Kurtz, who has apparently become imperially insane, madly dangerous, egomaniacal and murderous. From inside neutral, neighboring Cambodia, he is waging his own ferocious, independent war against Vietnamese intelligence agents with a guerrilla Montagnard, or Hmong, army. Willard's top-secret mission—and he has had missions like this before—is to "terminate" Kurtz. A river patrol boat and crew of four are put at Willard's disposal. Journeying through hazards and strange encounters, he finds Kurtz ensconced in majesty in the ruins of an ancient Cambodian temple, a self-appointed god who rules his band of native warriors from a jungle outpost. After some time and some gnomic conversation between the two men, Willard completes his mission, which is in essence a journey into the heart of the Vietnam War, and starts home.

One immediate difference from *Heart of Darkness*, other than the obvious ones of time and place, is that Conrad's protagonist, Charles Marlow, encounters African mysteries for the first time as he travels up a river into the Congo, but Coppola's Willard is a weathered veteran of this war. The opening sequence of *Apocalypse Now*, where he boozes it up in isolation in his hotel room, suggests that he is recovering from a recent, probably similar jungle experience (as well as from marital divorce). This difference from Marlow lessens the reactive power of the battle-fatigued Willard and makes him even more passive, more of an observer, than he was bound to be anyway through most of the film.

The screenplay otherwise suffers from its reliance on Conrad because it does not rely on him heavily enough. Milius and Coppola took an armature from Conrad, the journey into the interior to find the heart of darkness, the darkest reaches of the human psyche, but what they produced was a tour of a terrible war with a spurious finish. The war sequences here rank with those of Michael Cimino's *The Deer Hunter* (1978) and Oliver Stone's *Platoon* (1986) in their bitter fierceness, and nothing that scarifies the Vietnam debacle can be unworthy; but Conrad was grappling with immensity, not specifics. Several times in *Apocalypse Now* people say that human beings contain both good and evil, but this is mild stuff compared with what Conrad implies by "the horror."

At the end of the film, after killing Kurtz, Willard departs, making his way through a host of natives who let him pass. There's a slight hint that he might himself take over this Doré kingdom, but it passes. (Apparently the meekness of these warriors who had been devoted to Kurtz is based on J. G. Frazer's thesis in *The Golden Bough* [1890]—a book that happens to be part of Kurtz's small library—that, in the eyes of the worshippers, he who kills the god becomes the god.) Slowly, as the riverboat departs, the screen goes to black, and we hear Kurtz repeating, "The horror. The horror." But the true horror *Apocalypse Now* is not what Kurtz mouths in imitation of Conrad: it is the war itself.

On Willard's journey upriver, the boat is attacked first by machine gun, then by arrows, then by spear. But the message—that we're burrowing down layer by layer—

is too patent to affect us. Politically, too, the film is empty, but then it doesn't have much political ambition. What it wants is to be a moral allegory, like its Conradian model, and there it fizzles completely. Unlike the experiences in *Heart of Darkness*, those along the way in this picture do not knit toward a final episode of revelation, throwing retrospective light. No theme is developed. *Apocalypse Now* is finally a string of set-pieces, through which we are teased with advance data about a warring eccentric who turns out to be more or less what we expect.

Coppola's Kurtz is just a literature-lacquered version of the arch-villain in Richard Donner's *Superman* film (1978) or in the James Bond scripts: a mastermind who has seen through the spurious niceties of human behavior. Kurtz was a top officer with every chance to go higher, who at age thirty-eight opted to become a paratrooper, ostensibly because (like T. E. Lawrence) he wanted to take the difficult route, to test himself. Yet this lover of the knife-edge has only recently discovered that war is horrible. The turning point came for him after he led some men into a village to inoculate children against polio. The Viet Cong slithered in after he had left and cut off the inoculated arms of all the children. (Note: a number of Vietnam War authorities at the time objected to the Russian-roulette scene in *The Deer Hunter* because they knew no basis for it in fact. Is there any basis for this inoculation story? If not, what was holding up the experts' objections? The fact that, in this film, we also see Americans murdering Vietnamese?) It seems a bit late in Kurtz's day for him to become, like Albert Camus's *Caligula* (from the 1945 play), a murderer as a defense against the horrors of murder everywhere.

Kurtz's quotations from Conrad and from T. S. Eliot's 1925 poem "The Hollow Men" (in which Eliot quoted Conrad) are glib attempts to enlarge him. His own dialogue is larded with what I'd call soundtrack profundities. "You have the right to kill me," he tells Willard, "you have no right to judge me." Try that on your piano. As with the quotations, Coppola tries to deepen the picture, literally, with deep sound. Over and over again, the score hits ultra-low notes—made electronically or with an organ?—that shake the theater like Sensurround, an aural caricature of the picture's frantic, failed ambition to delve.

That *Apocalypse Now* ultimately falls short of what it might have been begins with the casting, particularly of Willard. The list of actors who turned down the role is saddening: Jack Nicholson, who was one of them, would by his very presence have enriched the picture. Martin Sheen, who got the role, was a much-delayed choice. Coppola actually started shooting with Harvey Keitel as Willard (after considering Steve McQueen for the part) but, after a few weeks, was dissatisfied and replaced him. Sheen, the supposed improvement, who has given good performances in the past, is utterly inadequate here. It's as if a gas-station attendant had been sent on this mission. Since Willard is only an observer through most of the story, the role needs innate force to keep it from being torpid. Sheen is limp and flat.

Marlon Brando, as Kurtz, is bald in several ways, shorn of hair and power, posturing and pompous. Brando seems to have put Coppola in a bind. The director got the powerful actor he wanted and then was stuck with him (though he thought of replacing Brando with Orson Welles). It's easy to see that Brando is merely teasing the director, providing a minimum of energy. We're told that Brando insisted on

improvising some of his dialogue; this malfeasance was, apparently, another egotistical stunt that Coppola simply had to endure. Caught between an inadequate leading man and a capricious capital figure, the picture has to depend almost desperately on Storaro's camera, which is prodigal with several kinds of beauty, and on the rest of the actors, who are helpful with the exception of the otherwise redoubtable Robert Duvall. He is pallid here as the crazy, battle-hungry helicopter commander, Lt. Colonel Kilgore, and not always comprehensible; what's worse, in his old-style cavalry hat, Duvall looks like Truman Capote at a costume party.

*Apocalypse Now* ultimately reduces to the story of a special-services assassin sent to kill a grander assassin, with a décor of eye-filling adventures along the way; but with nothing at the end except that, just as predicted, the victim is an inflated lunatic. What moral experience is in it for Willard? None. What moral insight is given into the Vietnam War? None. Coppola and Milius simply clung to the framework of their great, Conradian model, hoping that it would aggrandize their film in the way they hoped that quotations would aggrandize Kurtz.

Then, in 2001, came *Apocalypse Now Redux*. Very near the end of the lengthy closing credits for the new version comes the line: "Portions of this film were released in 1979 under the title *Apocalypse Now*." If the first version was incomplete, the word "redux" ("brought back," "returned") doesn't apply. And the word "portion" doesn't nearly reflect the sizes of the two versions: Version Two is 202 minutes long, but Version One was 153 minutes, hardly a mere "portion" of what is now released. Still, if this statement really is Coppola's view, why did he snuggle it away so coyly, and for so long?

The chief restorations are two sequences that were deleted in 1979 for reasons of narrative pace, so clearly Coppola's view of that pace has altered. Both sequences take place along the river. First, after the *Playboy* episode, the patrol boat encounters the *Playboy* helicopter downed upriver, in a remote base camp, for lack of fuel. The chopper's occupants have sought refuge during a fierce and torrential rainstorm in a disorganized, muddy medical-evacuation center. A deal is made by Willard with the *Playboy* manager, and in exchange for some of the boat's fuel, members of its crew are allowed to visit the bunnies in their helicopter as well as in some tents nearby (a kind of "frontier town" reminiscent of the one in Robert Altman's *McCabe & Mrs. Miller* [1971]). The sequence is entirely gratuitous: it seems to have been contrived, and not very deftly, to get some sex into the picture. (Willard does not participate.)

The second big restoration is at least more germane. The boat reaches a French-owned plantation in Cambodia, replete with a luxurious house, a small private army, and a large French family in residence. (Possibly such anomalies existed—French plantations safe even though the Viet Minh had hated the French long before the Americans came.) The sequence has a double purpose. First, during the conversation at the dinner table at which Willard is a guest with the family, the French patriarch expounds the French claim that they had been here for more than a century and that in their own Vietnam war they had at least been fighting for what they believed was theirs. The Americans are fighting for nothing, he says scornfully. Then, later, the patriarch's widowed daughter-in-law visits Willard's bedroom, where she delivers the

following bit of simulated sagacity: "There are two of you. Don't you see? One that kills and one that loves."

This long sequence is a doubtful blessing. The patriarch's speech is a blatant insert. Possibly it would have had some impact in 1979, before the Vietnam War was so thoroughly exposed as an American governmental deception and blunder. Even then it would have seemed mechanical, but now it is also superfluous (like the subsequent, restored monologue in which Kurtz, surrounded by Cambodian children, quotes from a lie-riddled, flag-waving *Time* magazine article, from September 22, 1967, about the "progress" of the Vietnam War). The chief interest in the scene is purely cinematic, a Coppola touch. The family has seated Willard on the eastern side of the dinner table so that, through all the speechifying, he is bothered by the setting sun and has to shade his eyes. He has been put, so to speak, on the solar spot. As for the bedroom scene, it serves only to give Willard some sex without *Playboy* grossness.

About these restorations Coppola misjudged. *Apocalypse Now* is one of the few instances where inclusion of outtakes has not helped. (Another was Steven Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* [1977].) His film was better off as it was. Still, its re-issue, even as expanded, gave us the chance to confirm that it is, though ruptured, a major work. The very concept of the film is large-scale and daring, immediately absorbing. The sheer ozone of the enterprise clearly exalted Coppola throughout. He himself has used the term "operatic" about the picture—he confirms it with the use of "The Ride of the Valkyries" during the helicopter raid—and it has the breadth, artistic embrace, and floridity that the word "opera" suggests.

A documentary about the film's chaotic making, shot in part by Coppola's wife, Eleanor, and including interviews with most of the cast and crew, appeared in 1991 with the title *Hearts of Darkness: A Filmmaker's Apocalypse*. Details of the difficulties during the two years of shooting are by now also well lodged in numerous articles and books—one book by Eleanor Coppola herself. (There was even an Off-Broadway play about the travails of making this film: all names were changed, of course.) Herewith a few of those difficulties. When Coppola began shooting *Apocalypse Now* in the Philippines in March 1976 (after pre-production work that began in mid-1975), the film's budget was $12 million, and the picture was set for release in April of 1977. But a series of setbacks slowed down production and drove up costs: along with extra-marital affairs, a suicidal director, drug use, and other forms of madness, a typhoon named Olga halted the shooting schedule for seven weeks; Marlon Brando, whose character was originally a lean, physically fit Green Beret (Conrad's Kurtz himself was gaunt and even emaciated), showed up in the Philippines weighing 285 pounds (only to become even more bloated later in life) and had to embark on a crash diet; Martin Sheen had a near-fatal heart attack and could not work for several weeks; and throughout the scriptwriting and shooting phases of the production, Coppola had difficulty in choosing an ending for the film. By the time *Apocalypse Now* was released in August of 1979, its budget had climbed to over $30 million, $18 million of which came from Coppola's personal assets and loans.

Still, despite the recurrent obstacles, the picture glows with Francis Ford Coppola's eagerness, ambition, and talent. Nominated for eight Academy Awards

(including Best Picture, Best Director, and Best Screenplay), the film won only two, though they were well-deserved: Best Cinematography and Best Sound. It was also awarded the prestigious Palme d'Or (top prize, shared with Volker Schlöndorff's *Tin Drum* [1979]) at the Cannes Festival. Despite being plagued by numerous delays and cost overruns during its lengthy production period, then, *Apocalypse Now* may just be—for all its flaws—the definitive Vietnam War film. The journey upriver unrolls before us, synesthetically speaking, like a visible tone poem, one whose sometimes surreal images indelibly sear the memory.

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*Tunnel Rats* (2007), directed by Uwe Boll

# Bruce Beresford's *Breaker Morant*



Prior to the late 1970s, Australia was something of a cinematic backwater. Occasionally, Hollywood and British production companies would turn up to use the country as a backdrop for films that ranged from the classic (*On the Beach* [1959]) to the egregious (*Ned Kelly* [1970], starring Mick Jagger). But the local movie scene, for the most part, was sleepy and unimaginative and very few Australian films traveled abroad. Then, without warning, Australia suddenly experienced an efflorescence of imaginative filmmaking, as movies such as *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975), *The Getting of Wisdom* (1977), *My Brilliant Career* (1979), and *Breaker Morant* (1980) began to be shown all over the world. Hitherto unknown talents from behind the camera (including Peter Weir and Bruce Beresford) and before it (most notably Mel Gibson and Judy Davis) became overnight sensations and were snatched up by Hollywood.

The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith (1978) was the first Australian film to be featured in official competition at the Cannes Festival, in addition to being the first Australian feature to treat the "problem" of the aborigine as something more than exotic cultural baggage. *Jimmie Blacksmith* opened in the United States to critical acclaim in the fall of 1980, after which Fred Schepisi, its director, was invited to Cannes in a continuation of that Festival's love affair with New Australian Cinema—an affair that had been initiated by Ken Hannam's archetypal *Sunday Too Far Away* (1975). Hannam's picture was selected for screening at the Directors' Fortnight in 1975, as was Schepisi's *The Devil's Playground* in 1976. By 1978 there were twenty

Australian films at Cannes, including *Jimmie Blacksmith*. Following this accomplishment, several new Australian films were significant hits at the Cannes Festival, and later in the U.S., in the next two years, including Gillian Armstrong's *My Brilliant Career* in 1979 and Beresford's *Breaker Morant* in 1980.

My subject here is *Breaker Morant*. Toward the end of this picture, a young Australian soldier, George Witton, is being led, handcuffed and sobbing, from his temporary military prison in Pietersburg, Transvaal, South Africa, to serve a life sentence of penal servitude in England. Momentarily, he breaks free of his captors and runs back toward his older fellow prisoners, Harry Morant (Edward Woodward) and Peter Handcock, who are in their cells awaiting execution that morning by firing squad. "Why are they doing this to us, Harry?" Witton screams, to which Morant shouts back, "We're scapegoats, George…scapegoats for the bloody Empire!" Thus does *Breaker Morant* proclaim, for the final and decisive time, that it is no simple platitudinous melodrama about military injustice, but instead a sterling dramatization of one of the most controversial episodes in Australian colonial history.

The year is 1901; the place Pietersburg, Northern Transvaal, a region infested with Boer (Dutch-descended) commandos; the conflict the Boer War (1899–1902), in which imperial Great Britain defeated two Boer nations in South Africa: the Republic of Transvaal in the north, where diamonds and gold had been discovered; and the Orange Free State in the southern portion of the country. (All of South Africa was united in 1910 and remained a dominion of the British Empire governed under a form of constitutional monarchy until 1961, when the country left the Commonwealth and became a republic.) In 1901, the British forces—composed of English, Irish, and Australian troops, to name only those participants mentioned in the movie—find themselves engaged in a form of guerrilla warfare that they are ill-prepared to fight and that they can win only at great cost. In order to prevent Germany from entering the conflict and thus prolonging it, the British have decided to sacrifice three Australians, accused of executing a German missionary as well as a number of Boer prisoners, as the price for ending this costly venture as soon as possible.

The film is a dramatization of the January 1902 court martial of the Australian soldiers for the murders of the Boers and the Reverend H. V. C. Hess. The three are members of a specially created counter-guerrilla force known as the Bushveldt Carbineers (to which unit as many colonials were assigned as possible, and which was disbanded less than a year after it came into existence), who are fighting on the British side. (Australian Federation occurs in 1900, before the action of the film begins, although Australia remained a member of the British Commonwealth.) The guerrillas' leader is Lieutenant Harry "Breaker" Morant (his nickname comes from his skill at breaking horses), an English-born poet, adventurer, and soldier, who signed up with the Carbineers, as he wryly observes, "on April Fools' Day." He is a kind of Renaissance man, a representative of culture, whom we even see singing at a piano at one point. Morant's fellow accused are Lieutenant Peter Handcock, a pragmatist (and womanizer) who has joined the army to provide for his wife and son and escape economic hardship in Australia, and Lieutenant George Witton, an idealist (and naïf) who signed up because he has inherited his genteel family's belief in the values of the British Empire.

The prosecutor, Major Charles Bolton, is urged to secure a speedy conviction, which will avert the danger of a German intervention in the conflict on the side of the Boers. However, during the three-week trial the only recently appointed defense counsel, Major J. F. Thomas (Jack Thompson), mounts an unexpectedly powerful argument on behalf of his fellow Australians, establishing their bravery and effectiveness in dealing with Boer insurgents and ultimately disclosing that they were acting on unwritten orders to take no prisoners—orders that had been issued by Lord Horatio Kitchener himself, head of the British forces. Nevertheless, it becomes clear that, to facilitate a peace treaty with the Boers that will also satisfy the British and Australian governments, the three men will have to be sacrificed on the altar of political expediency. On the casting vote of the president of the court, Lieutenant Colonel H. C. Denny, the men are therefore found innocent of the murder of the German missionary but guilty of all other charges. (News of the verdicts was suppressed for three weeks, and the trial itself was conducted in secret to avoid unfavorable press attention.)

Apart from the careful delineation of distinctions among the three Australians, three sets of tensions work to make *Breaker Morant* a compelling drama. The first is the clash between the admirably courageous but arrogantly defiant Morant and the worthy and humane, but initially disinterested and seemingly inexperienced defense counsel, Major Thomas. Our interest in the unraveling of the film's plot is no greater than our interest in the developing relationship between Thomas and the men he has been ordered to defend, especially Morant. The second set of tensions revolves around the clash between justice and expedience. Were Morant and his Australian compatriots victims of British injustice? Were they themselves colonial martyrs to the interests of British imperialism during the Boer War? Or was Morant in particular a liar, thief, drunk, murderer, and all-around scoundrel—as some of his accusers attested—who deserved his fate? The third set of tensions is connected with the issue of war crimes. To wit: Must a soldier in modern warfare obey orders blindly, or does he have a higher duty to refuse to carry out an unlawful order? There is no question that Morant, Handcock, and Witton are guilty of killing Boers, but is it right, as Major Thomas puts it in his summation, to judge soldiers by standards of civilian morality in a war where, tragically, "horrors are committed by normal men in abnormal situations"? Can we hope to pass judgment on these men, he asks, until we ourselves have been subjected to the same pressures and provocations as they have?

Beresford avoids the pitfalls of overtly verbal, visually static courtroom dramas not only through incisive editing, which gives the exchanges between the men genuine edge and momentum, but also—and above all—by structuring the script of *Breaker Morant* around a series of flashbacks. (The picture opens at the very end of the court martial, with Morant making a final statement, so that, in a sense, all of *Breaker Morant*, even the trial itself, is a flashback, which makes this movie even more fatalistic than the usual flashback film.) The flashbacks come at instances in the film where they counterpoise or complement something that has been said in the court or the accused officers' living quarters. They also, of course, allow a break-out or opening up from the confines of the courtroom and let in the sky and space of the *veldt*, a release that the audience needs at certain points, not only so that it may relax

its emotions, but also so that it may place the drama in its proper geographic—or geopolitical—context.

The film's flashbacks are roughly grouped into three blocks, each of which corresponds to one of the three charges against the Australians, namely, the execution of the captured Boer prisoner Visser, the execution of six surrendered Boer prisoners, and the murder of Reverend Hess. The first group of flashbacks (introduced through the testimony of Captain Robertson, Sergeant Major Drummond, and Trooper Botha) establishes the character of Morant by showing his emotional reaction to the mutilation of his friend Captain Simon Hunt: he orders the immediate execution of the Boer captured wearing Hunt's khaki jacket. The second flashback segment, the shortest one, dramatizes George Witton's vehement objections to Morant's order to execute the surrendered Boers and then Witton's own killing, in self-defense, of one of the prisoners who attacks him by surprise. The third block of flashbacks is probably the most intricate in its structure. Related through the viewpoints of Corporal Sharp, Morant, and Handcock, and alternating with scenes set in the Australian prisoners' quarters, this section concentrates on the third charge, the killing of Hess, and is presented in terms of Peter Handcock's actions on the day of the shooting.

The third group of flashbacks confirms that, with Morant's approval, Handcock did go out and shoot the German missionary, just after he has told us in the courtroom that he did not shoot Reverend Hess because he was courting two (married) Boer women at the time. (He was, indeed, doing so, *after* he shot Hess.) Certainly the murder of Hess is the crime with the most overt political significance within the context of the Boer War. While the shooting of Visser might be excused as Morant's overheated response to the mutilation of Captain Hunt (who, still alive after being shot, had his neck broken, his face stamped on with boots, and his genitals slashed), and the execution of the surrendered Boer prisoners as justifiable adherence to orders (even if they were only verbally transmitted), the shooting of Hess is a calculated action designed to prevent him from passing information on to the enemy. It is thus the only crime committed with "malice aforethought" and without official sanction, the only crime committed against a subject of a country not officially involved in the war, and the only crime that Handcock and Morant conceal with a direct lie, since they never admit to anyone except Witton their role in the death of Hess. Hence we are dealing here not with sentimentally conceived victims of judicial bias but, at least in the cases of Morant and Handcock, tarnished heroes with blood on their hands. In fact, we are shown the murder of Hess as a cold-blooded act of long-range assassination. Ironically, this is the one charge on which the Australians are acquitted.

Each block of flashbacks, then, focuses on one of the accused, so that, in the third case, we observe Handcock's indulgence of his carnal appetite, for killing as well as sex; in the second case, we see the real-life challenge presented to Witton's idealism; and, in the first instance, we get visual evidence of Morant's passionate and impulsive nature. At the same time, all except one of these flashback sequences are introduced by a particular witness testifying on the stand. In this way the conventions of the courtroom drama are brought into play, as we quickly realize that every witness has a reason for giving hostile or unreliable testimony against the defendants. The

convention exploited in each of these instances is, of course, basic to the courtroom genre: that of the suspect witness.

There is an additional Capra-esque dimension to the trial, as Major Thomas is presented as the courageous underdog fighting not only a tenacious prosecutor but also a president of court who is making clear his preference for conviction. The use of close-ups in this situation is particularly telling, never more so than on the occasion when Lord Kitchener's aide, Colonel Ian Hamilton, takes the stand to deny any knowledge of Kitchener's unwritten orders. The close-up of him as he takes the oath is so extreme as to verge on distortion—appropriate enough for a man who has just sworn to tell the truth while inwardly knowing he has come to court to do the exact opposite. As with the best screen courtroom dramas, the audience here becomes an additional jury, assessing the characters, witnesses, and issues before it.

The success of *Breaker Morant*, finally, as political protest derives from its effectiveness in arousing the audience's indignation and outrage, emotions that, operating on a simplistic level, do not invite a dispassionate analysis of underlying complexities and consequently admit little qualification. (After all, even the murder of the non-combatant but nonetheless spying Hess can be justified from a ground soldier's point of view.) In *Breaker Morant*, the protagonists are portrayed as victims who struggle heroically yet hopelessly against overwhelming odds. Lieutenants Morant, Handcock, and Witton are persecuted by their British military superiors and the power structure the latter represent. Their immediate antagonists, the members of the court, themselves perpetuate the power of the British army and, more broadly, the imperialistic interests of the British colonial empire. However, the very success of the film in using melodramatic conventions results in a distortion of a number of truths central to the historical reality of the Boer War. Indeed, by centering the "problematic" of the flashback sequences on the three protagonists and the witnesses before the court, *Breaker Morant* makes the role of the Boers seem comparatively unproblematic.

Let me elaborate by considering the roles of both the Australians and the Boers in the Boer War. This was, first and foremost, a war of imperialism fought between the British and the Boers. Within this framework, as enlisted men fighting on the British side, the Australians' role in the conflict was a fundamentally ambiguous and even complicit one. While not denying the status of the Australians as British colonial subjects, we must also admit that, as members of the British army, they were active enforcers of England's expansionist policies. There are thus at least two simultaneous *loci* of conflict implicit in this situation: the antagonism between the Australian officers (in the cases of Morant, Handcock, and Witton) and their British superiors, and the conflict between the Boers and the British forces. Within this scheme, the Boers form the group consistently opposed to colonial power (though not to Boer power over, or disenfranchisement of, black South Africans), while the British assume a similarly monolithic role as colonial adventurists. The Australians, however, occupy dual roles as both victims of colonial exploitation and collaborators in an imperialistic cause. While the Australians can be viewed as victims *and* perpetrators, then, the demands of melodrama make it imperative to suppress the second of these two roles.

Although the Boers themselves were, historically speaking, one of the two central groups of antagonists in the Boer War, their presence in *Breaker Morant* is so drastically displaced as to render them almost irrelevant to the main plot and to discredit the validity of their cause. Indeed, their existence is simultaneously acknowledged and dismissed in the film's opening title: "The issues were complex, but basically the Boers wished to retain their independence from England." In the film itself, the execution of Boer prisoners is simply the pretext used by the British to put the Australians on trial. Otherwise, the Boer presence is drastically circumscribed by the dramatic dictates of Beresford's film.

First, the Boers are rarely presented in combat situations in *Breaker Morant*, although this was obviously their primary role in the actual conflict. The film contains eight major scenes in which Boers figure, but only two of these eight instances depict the Bushveldt Carbineers and the Boers in combat with each other, for this would reveal a dimension of significance that Beresford wishes to suppress. Second, in the two scenes that do involve the Boers and the Australians in combat—the failed Boer ambush out on the *veldt* (together with the Australian reprisal for that ambush) and the Boer surprise dawn attack on the British garrison—the first instance presents the Boers only as murky, anonymous antagonists and, in both instances, the Boers are portrayed as cunning, if not downright deceptive, in taking the offensive against the British forces. Third, of the eight major scenes in which the Boers appear, five occur in flashback, the three exceptions being the British officers' dinner, the discovery of the body of the collaborationist Boer named Trooper Botha, and the dawn attack on the British camp.

This dependence on flashback is significant in two ways. First, the flashbacks focus, not on the legitimacy of the Boer struggle, but instead on determining the legitimacy of the charges against Morant, Handcock, and Witton. Second, the literal segregation of the Boers from the primary, present-tense narrative frame effectively diminishes their importance as *dramatis personae*. Moreover, Boers who have defined dramatic functions are all Boers who have chosen to collaborate with their enemy: Trooper Botha, the scout/interpreter for the Bushveldt Carbineers; the Boer ladies who accompany the British officers at their dinner; the Boer who comes to sing for the guests at this dinner; and Handcock's two Boer lady-friends.

Through all of this, *Breaker Morant* manages to avoid showing the Boers and the British forces engaged in face-to-face fighting on equal footing, a situation that, unlike the guerrilla fighting that *is* shown, would be most truly representative of the central conflict in the Boer War. Since the justice of the Boer struggle is never considered and the Boer is never shown meeting his opponents on equal ground in combat, the most basic facts about the war are omitted or neglected along with the possibility of portraying the Boer as fighting a war of resistance against an army constituted of both British and colonial forces. In defense of Beresford's suppression of the Boer point of view, one could argue that the film could not possibly encompass every viewpoint (including that of black South Africans, who are represented here, somewhat ironically, only by the court reporter); and that, in this respect, *Breaker Morant* only mirrored contemporaneous Hollywood movies about the Vietnam War such as *The Deer Hunter* (1978) and *Apocalypse Now* (1979), which lamented the loss

of American innocence during that conflict but gave little screen time to the Vietnamese perspective on events. Fair enough, but the American forces in Vietnam did not include colonials; the British forces in South Africa did, and Beresford missed the opportunity, through fuller depiction of the Boer struggle, to equate British oppression of the Boers with British exploitation of the Australians.

The director does tease us, however, with one visual equation of the Boers and the Australians. During the flashback showing Morant in evening clothes singing to a gathering of dinner guests that includes his one-time fiancée, the sister of Captain Hunt, the camera moves in for a close-up of the Breaker, followed by a close-up of the rapt face of Hunt's sister (whose eyes eventually turn downward). Watching this scene, we remember that we saw its counterpart earlier. At the British officers' dinner, the camera also moves in for a medium close-up of the Boer who is singing, and the scene ends with a telling shot of the Boer woman seated in front of him (a woman whose eyes also eventually turn downward). In this brief instance, the film seems to consider the relationship between the political stances of the Australians and the Boers, since each is, after all, the counterpart of the other in regard to the British. The moment passes, but the question remains: What if *Breaker Morant* had chosen to explore this implicit parallel between colonials, and what difference in perspective would such a line of inquiry have yielded for the total meaning of the picture?

*Breaker Morant* was nonetheless a success overall—unsurprisingly, especially in Australia, where it won ten prizes (including best film and best director) at the 1980 Australian Film Institute Awards for its sharply etched celebration of Australian masculinity, comradeship in adversity, and defiant anti-imperialism. This success came at a critical time in Bruce Beresford's career. Following a spell in the 1960s as chairman of the British Film Institute Production Board, during which time he made numerous shorts, he returned to his native Australia in 1972 to make features (while also working in television). His *Barry McKenzie* comedies (1972, 1974) were popular with the public but reviled by critics. Beresford's reputation rose later in the seventies with his adaptation of David Williamson's 1971 theatrical satire *Don's Party* (1976), and with his sensitive version of Henry Handel Richardson's 1910 novel *The Getting of Wisdom*, a coming-of-age story set in a girls' boarding school.

It was only with *Breaker Morant*, however, that Beresford's talents—including a strong narrative sense as well as visual one and a gift for getting the best out of actors—came to full maturity. (The film was criticized by some, though, for its marginalization of its female characters—despite the fact that Beresford's career as a whole reveals a strong feminist leaning—a criticism that is unclear, since, as far as I know, women did not take part in the Boer War and therefore could only have been "marginal" to its fighting: as they are in *Breaker Morant*.) After its showing in 1980 at the Cannes Festival (where Jack Thompson won the award for best supporting actor), Beresford was invited to Hollywood, where he directed two Oscar-winning films in the next decade, *Tender Mercies* (1983) and *Driving Miss Daisy* (1989).

Although loosely based on a 1978 play by Kenneth G. Ross and a script by Jonathan Hardy and David Stevens for an unrealized television movie, *Breaker Morant* was very much Beresford's own project. Ross himself was not concerned with trying to tell the entire story of Morant or with exploring his central character,

so much as with *displaying* that character in action. The action of the drama is therefore composed of a series of unusually short scenes (from which the Boers themselves are virtually excluded), chronologically arranged—without flashbacks—but shifting from setting to setting: courtroom to cell to bivouac to Lord Kitchener's headquarters and back to the courtroom. That chronology includes only the trial and last days of Morant, based on what is known of the historical circumstances as drawn from George Witton's *Scapegoats of the Empire: The Story of the Bushveldt Carbineers* (1907).

The final credits also acknowledge Kit Denton's 1973 novel *The Breaker* as a background source, but Denton's work is essentially a fictionalized biography of Morant, and the court martial occupies only its last sixty pages. This is because Denton does not make Morant's case a symbolic focal point around which large issues of twentieth-century warfare revolve. Even in the parts of the book's court-martial section that he adapts, Beresford makes significant changes, distributing some of the dialogue to different characters and particularly emphasizing wry humor and irony. An important difference occurs, for example, when one of the accused is asked what rules they were operating under as soldiers of the Bushveldt Carbineers. In Denton's novel, it is Handcock who answers, in a jocular fashion, that "we got 'em and we shot 'em, under Rule 303," referring to the caliber of the Lee-Enfield rifle used by Morant's mounted infantry regiment. In the film, Beresford gives this line to Morant, and it is delivered not jokingly but angrily, even menacingly, with Morant drawing a stark contrast between the cozy moral certainties of the courtroom and the harsh justice meted out by soldiers brutalized by war. This argument will be at the heart of Major Thomas's summation on behalf of the defendants (in a speech that's not in the novel or Ross's play but is entirely Beresford's own work), when he insists that the actions of such men cannot be judged by conventional standards of civilized behavior.

Beresford conducted extensive research at the National Army Museum in London and in Australian libraries. One discovery was the manuscript by Witton, who, after his life sentence had been commuted in 1904, wrote the aforementioned account of the whole affair titled *Scapegoats of the Empire*, which was quickly suppressed after its publication in 1907. (Its eventual re-publication in 1982 came about undoubtedly as a result of the success of the film.) An equally remarkable discovery was a letter home from a member of the firing squad, giving a firsthand account of the execution of Morant and Handcock and prompting one of the film's most affecting moments, when Morant takes Handcock's hand as they walk toward their appointed place of death. This is the kind of pricelessly authentic detail that would ordinarily not have occurred to a screenwriter-director dramatizing the story of guerrilla warriors on the *veldt*.

In his opening up of the material, moreover, Beresford takes full advantage of Donald McAlpine's imposing cinematography (also on view in other Beresford pictures such as *Don's Party* and *The Getting of Wisdom*) in scenes of action that bring to life the courtroom testimony and, at the same time, nearly make a character of the harsh South African landscape. Cleverly, the director uses this opening up for purposes of irony as well as illustration. He contrasts the primitive conditions of the

prison compound, for instance, with the luxuriant accoutrements of Lord Kitchener's dwelling—a contrast that underlines an important theme, the distance between the decision-makers in war and those whom the decisions affect. He also exploits discrepancies between what we hear during the trial and what we see on the screen. For example, the Boer scout's self-serving version, before the court, of his attitude toward the shooting of prisoners is contradicted by what we see him doing on the *veldt*.

Similarly, although Morant's thirst for revenge against the Boers is fueled by the belief that they mutilated the body of Captain Hunt while he was still alive, we see that Hunt, after being wounded, played dead subsequent to his men's retreat and then rose up to shoot one of the Boer leaders emerging from his hiding place. The Boers' subsequent killing of Hunt, then, is not an act of mindless barbarity but retribution for the sneaky killing of one of their own. Their motivation, in fact, is not very different from Morant's own. Like John Wayne's revenge hero in a film Beresford much admires, John Ford's *The Searchers* (1956), Morant may have more in common with his "savage" adversaries than he cares to expressly acknowledge. Indeed, as he suggests at one point, the Australians (sometimes actually addressed by the British as "you colonials") may even be fighting on the wrong side. This may help to explain a kind of death wish on the part of Morant, for, just prior his execution, he refuses the offer of an escape-horse from a sympathetic fellow soldier.

The quality of Beresford's direction reaches new heights in the film's final few minutes, which are a masterly synthesis of its humor, heroism, and irony. A fateful overhead shot (similar to the one that concludes the court martial) frames Morant and Handcock in the prison courtyard on one side of the screen, while on the other side workmen outside the prison walls are busy constructing their coffins. "They could have had the decency to measure us first," grumbles Handcock, to which Morant replies serenely, "I don't suppose they've had many complaints." Morant and Major Thomas share a dignified farewell, and Morant courteously refuses the accompanying padre's offer of a final blessing, asking instead for the following epitaph for his headstone, from the book of Matthew: "And a man's foes shall be they of his own household" (10:36). Under a beautiful dawn sky, the condemned men walk hand in hand to two chairs in the distance and seat themselves before the firing squad, refusing blindfolds. "Shoot straight, you bastards! Don't make a mess of it!" shouts Morant, to the end combining a dark sense of humor with a strong sense of military pride. The wonderfully incongruous final images show soldiers loading the bodies into the coffins and having difficulty making Handcock's legs fit—a misfit even in death, it seems. Over the ending credits, Morant's voice is heard singing "Soldiers of the Queen" (1898, by Leslie Stuart), a song in praise of the very forces by which he has just been executed. (Martial music of this kind is used in this way—ironically—throughout *Breaker Morant*.)

*Breaker Morant*'s stature has deservedly grown over the years. In a varied and distinguished career, Beresford has done nothing finer, with the possible exception of *Tender Mercies*. *Breaker Morant* belongs with Stanley Kubrick's *Paths of Glory* (1957) and Joseph Losey's *King and Country* (1964) among the cinema's most scathing indictments of military (in)justice; and, from the perspective of the twenty-

first century, its interrogation of atrocities committed under the heading of "standard operating procedure" looks more relevant and prescient than ever. One certainly need not look very far in the United States for parallels, including, when such guerrilla procedures are deemed politically unacceptable, the speed with which scapegoats are found and soldiers on the ground become victims of the hypocrisies of government and high command.

At the time *Breaker Morant* was released, as a matter of fact, many, including this writer, saw Beresford's film as a telescopic comment on, or metaphor for, similar retaliatory incidents against the enemy that had occurred during the fighting in the Vietnam War, including the My Lai Massacre of March 1968. Like the Americans in Vietnam six decades after the Boer War, the British often could not tell the difference between non-combatant and combatant, for the latter frequently wore no uniform and fought only on a part-time basis. The British also attempted to separate civilians from fighters by herding civilians (mostly women and children) into concentration camps, again like the Americans in Vietnam—according to whose Strategic Hamlet Program chosen villages were surrounded with barbed wire or bamboo fence to keep away the Vietcong. Lord Kitchener even enacted a scorched-earth policy intended to destroy Boer homes and farms in South Africa, just as President Lyndon Johnson authorized the use of napalm and Agent Orange to defoliate areas of the Vietnamese countryside friendly to the Vietcong.

The American connection aside, what was the British reaction to *Breaker Morant*? The film received no nominations from BAFTA, the British Academy of Film and Television Arts; was ignored by the British Film Institute's main publication, *Sight and Sound*; and was patronizingly likened to the morally bombastic films of Stanley Kramer (most significantly, in the present context, *Judgment at Nuremberg* [1961]) by the BFI's sister publication, *Monthly Film Bulletin*. Perhaps its message struck too close to home. *Breaker Morant*'s most eloquent British champion was the revered critic Dilys Powell, who admired its emotional power and moral complexity, and who put her finger on a key element that Beresford had highlighted: that the Boer War was a different kind of guerrilla warfare, being fought by civilians as well as soldiers, which brought with it antiheroic values, ruthless means of combat, and new forms of military apprehension that continue to this day (295). Amen.

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## FILMOGRAPHY I: KEY WORKS OF THE NEW AUSTRALIAN CINEMA

*Walkabout* (1971), directed by Nicolas Roeg

*The Adventures of Barry McKenzie* (1972), directed by Bruce Beresford

*The Cars That Ate Paris* (1974), directed by Peter Weir

*Petersen* (1974), directed by Tim Burstall

*Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975), directed by Peter Weir

*Sunday Too Far Away* (1975), directed by Ken Hannam

*The Devil's Playground* (1976), directed by Fred Schepisi

*Don's Party* (1976), directed by Bruce Beresford

*The Last Wave* (1977), directed by Peter Weir

*Backroads* (1977), directed by Phillip Noyce

*Summerfield* (1977), directed by Ken Hannam

*The Getting of Wisdom* (1977), directed by Bruce Beresford

*The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* (1978), directed by Fred Schepisi

*Newsfront* (1978), directed by Phillip Noyce

*Mad Max* (1979), directed by George Miller

*My Brilliant Career* (1979), directed by Gillian Armstrong

*The Odd Angry Shot* (1979), directed by Tom Jeffrey

*The Plumber* (1979), directed by Peter Weir

*Breaker Morant* (1980), directed by Bruce Beresford

*Caddie* (1980), directed by Donald Crombie

*Manganinnie* (1980), directed by John Honey

*Gallipoli* (1981), directed by Peter Weir

*Puberty Blues* (1981), directed by Bruce Beresford

*Heatwave* (1982), directed by Phillip Noyce

*The Man from Snowy River* (1982), directed by George T. Miller

*Monkey Grip* (1982), directed by Ken Cameron

*We of the Never Never* (1982), directed by Igor Auzins

*Lonely Hearts* (1982), directed by Paul Cox

*The Year of Living Dangerously* (1982), directed by Peter Weir

*Careful, He Might Hear You* (1983), directed by Carl Schultz

*My First Wife* (1984), directed by Paul Cox

*Burke & Wills* (1985), directed by Graeme Clifford

*The Fringe Dwellers* (1986), directed by Bruce Beresford

*The Year My Voice Broke* (1987), directed by John Duigan

*The Lighthorsemen* (1987), directed by Simon Wincer

*A Cry in the Dark* (1988), directed by Fred Schepisi

*Emerald City* (1988), directed by Michael Jenkins

## FILMOGRAPHY II: KEY FILMS ABOUT THE BOER WAR

*The Boer War* (1914), directed by George Melford

*Rhodes of Africa* (1936), directed by Berthold Viertel & Geoffrey Barkas

*For Valor* (1937), directed by Tom Walls

*Ohm Krüger* (1941), directed by Hans Steinhoff

*The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1943), directed by Michael Powell &
	Emeric Pressburger

*Fortune in Diamonds* (1951), directed by David MacDonald

*Majuba: Heuwel van Duiwe* (1968), directed by David Millin

*Strangers at Sunrise* (1969), directed by Percival Rubens

*Young Winston* (1972), directed by Richard Attenborough

*Breaker Morant* (1980), directed by Bruce Beresford

*Torn Allegiance* (1988), directed by Alan Nathanson

*Verraaiers* (2013), directed by Paul Eilers

# Film Credits and Directors' Feature Filmographies

### *The Last Laugh* (1924)

**Director:** F. W. Murnau
**Screenplay:** Carl Mayer
**Cinematographer:** Karl Freund
**Editor:** Elfi Böttrich
**Music:** Giuseppe Becce
**Production Designer:** Edgar G. Ulmer
**Running time:** 90 minutes
**Format:** 35mm, in black and white; silent
**Cast:** Emil Jannings (Hotel doorman/porter), Maly Delschaft (His niece), Max Hiller (Her bridegroom), Emilie Kurz (Bridegroom's aunt), Hans Unterkircher (Hotel manager), Olaf Storm (Young hotel guest), Hermann Vallentin (Potbellied hotel guest), Georg John (Night watchman), Emmy Wyda (Thin neighbor), Harald Madsen (Wedding musician), Carl Schenstrøm (Wedding musician), O. E. Hasse, Fritz Neumann-Schüler

**F. W. Murnau (1888–1931)**
    *Nosferatu: A Symphony of Horror* (1922)
    *The Last Laugh* (1924)
    *Tartuffe* (1925)
    *Faust* (1926)
    *Sunrise* (1927)
    *Tabu* (1931)

### *Battleship Potemkin* (1925)

**Director:** Sergei Eisenstein
**Screenplay:** Sergei Eisenstein, Nina Agadzhanova-Shutko
**Cinematographer:** Eduard Tisse
**Editors:** Sergei Eisenstein, Grigori Aleksandrov
**Music:** Edmund Meisel
**Art Director:** Vasili Rakhals
**Running time:** 65–85 minutes, depending on the print
**Format:** 35mm, in black and white; silent
**Cast:** Aleksandr Antonov (Grigory Vakulinchuk), Vladimir Barsky (Captain Golikov), Grigori Aleksandrov (Chief Officer Giliarovsky), Ivan Bobrov (Sailor flogged while sleeping), Mikhail Gomorov (Militant sailor), Aleksandr Levshin (Petty Officer), N. Poltavtseva (Woman with pince-nez), Konstantin Feldman

(Student agitator), Prokopenko (Mother carrying wounded boy), A. Glauberman (Wounded boy), Beatrice Vitoldi (Woman with baby carriage), Daniil Antonovich (Sailor), Julia Eisenstein (Woman with food for sailors), Sergei Eisenstein (Odessa citizen), Andrey Fayt (Recruit), Korobei (Legless veteran), Marusov (Officer), Protopopov (Old Man), Repnikova (Woman on the steps), Brodsky (Student), Zerenin (Student), Vladimir Uralsky, Aleksanteri Ahola-Valo

**Sergei Eisenstein (1898–1948)**
*Strike* (1925)
*Battleship Potemkin* (1925)
*October: Ten Days That Shook the World* (1927)
*The General Line*, a.k.a. *Old and New* (1929)
*Thunder over Mexico* (1933)
*¡Que viva México!* (1932, released 1979)
*Alexander Nevsky* (1938)
*Ivan the Terrible, Part I* (1944)
*Ivan the Terrible, Part II* (1945, released 1958)

## The Gold Rush (1925)

**Director:** Charles Chaplin
**Screenplay:** Charles Chaplin
**Cinematographer:** Roland H. Totheroh
**Editor:** Charles Chaplin
**Music:** Charles Chaplin (the film was re-released in 1942 with a musical soundtrack by Max Terr and with Chaplin's narration)
**Production Designer:** Charles D. Hall
**Running time:** 82 minutes
**Format:** 35mm, in black and white; silent
**Cast:** Charles Chaplin (The Lone Prospector), Mack Swain (Big Jim McKay), Tom Murray (Black Larsen), Georgia Hale (Georgia), Malcolm Waite (Jack Cameron), Henry Bergman (Hank Curtis), Stanley Sanford (Barman), Barbara Pierce (Manicurist), "Daddy" Taylor (Ancient Dancing Prospector); Betty Morrissey, Kay Desleys, Joan Lowell (Georgia's Friends); John Rand, Albert Austin, Heine Conklin, Allan Garcia, Tom Wood (Prospectors); A. J. O'Connor, Art Walker (Officers)

**Charles Chaplin (1889–1977)**
*The Kid* (1921)
*A Woman of Paris* (1923)
*The Gold Rush* (1925)
*The Circus* (1928)
*City Lights* (1931)
*Modern Times* (1936)
*The Great Dictator* (1940)
*Monsieur Verdoux* (1947)
*Limelight* (1952)
*A King in New York* (1957)
*A Countess from Hong Kong* (1967)

## *The Blue Angel* (1930)

**Director:** Josef von Sternberg
**Screenplay:** Carl Zuckmayer, Karl Vollmöller, & Robert Liebmann, from the 1905 novel by Heinrich Mann titled *Professor Unrath*
**Cinematographers:** Günther Rittau, Hans Schneeberger
**Editors:** Walter Klee (German version), S. K. Winston (English version)
**Music:** Friedrich Holländer
**Sound:** Fritz Thiery
**Art Directors:** Otto Hunte, Emil Hasler
**Costume Designer:** Tihamer Varady
**Running time:** 124 minutes
**Format:** 35mm, in black and white
**Cast:** Emil Jannings (Prof. Immanuel Rath), Marlene Dietrich (Lola-Lola), Kurt Gerron (The magician, Kiepert), Rosa Valetti (Guste Kiepert, the magician's wife), Hans Albers (Mazeppa, the strongman), Reinhold Bernt (The clown), Éduard von Winterstein (Headmaster of the school), Hans Roth (Caretaker of the secondary school), Rolf Müller (Angst, a pupil), Roland Varno (Lohmann, a pupil), Karl Balhaus (Ertzum, a pupil), Robert Klein-Lörk (Goldstaub, a pupil), Wolfgang Staudte (Pupil), Károly Huszár (a.k.a. Charles Puffy, innkeeper), Wilhelm Diegelmann (Sea captain), Gerhard Bienert (Policeman), Ilse Fürstenberg (Rath's maid), The Weintraub Syncopators (Orchestra), Friedrich Holländer (Pianist)

**Josef von Sternberg (1894–1969)**
*The Salvation Hunters* (1925)
*The Exquisite Sinner* (1926)
*The Sea Gull*, a.k.a. *A Woman of the Sea* (1926, unreleased)
*Underworld* (1927)
*The Last Command* (1928)
*The Dragnet* (1928, lost)
*The Docks of New York* (1928)
*The Case of Lena Smith* (1929)
*Thunderbolt* (1929)
*The Blue Angel* (1930)
*Morocco* (1930)
*Dishonored* (1931)
*An American Tragedy* (1931)
*Shanghai Express* (1932)
*Blonde Venus* (1932)
*The Scarlet Empress* (1934)
*The Devil is a Woman* (1935)
*Crime and Punishment* (1935)
*The King Steps Out* (1936)
*Sergeant Madden* (1939)
*The Shanghai Gesture* (1941)
*Macao* (1952)
*The Saga of Anatahan* (1953)
*Jet Pilot (*1957)

### *Daybreak* (1939)

**Director:** Marcel Carné
**Screenplay:** Jacques Prévert, Jacques Viot
**Cinematographers**: Philippe Agostini, André Bac, Albert Viguier, Curt Courant
**Editor:** René Le Hénaff
**Music:** Maurice Jaubert
**Production Designer:** Alexandre Trauner
**Costume Designer:** Boris Bilinsky
**Running time:** 93 minutes
**Format:** 35mm, in black and white
**Cast:** Jean Gabin (François), Jacqueline Laurent (Françoise), Jules Berry (M. Valentin), Arletty, a.k.a. Léonie Marie Julie Bathiat (Clara), Arthur Devère (M. Gerbois), Bernard Blier (Gaston), Marcel Pérès (Paulo), Germaine Lix (Singer), Georges Douking (Blind man), René Génin (Concierge), René Bergeron (Café owner), Gabrielle Fontan (Old lady on the stairs), Jacques Baumer (Commissioner), Annie Carriel (Tenant), Georges Gosset (Agent), Albert Malbert (Agent), Marcel Rouzé (Agent), Maurice Salabert (Agent), Léonce Corne, Henry Farty, Robert Le Ray, Marcel Melrac, André Nicolle, Guy Rapp, Max Rogerys, Madeleine Rousset, Claude Walter

**Marcel Carné (1906–96)**
　　*Jenny* (1936)
　　*Bizarre, Bizarre* (1937)
　　*Port of Shadows* (1938)
　　*Hôtel du Nord* (1938)
　　*Daybreak* (1939)
　　*The Devil's Envoys* (1942)
　　*Children of Paradise* (1945)
　　*Gates of the Night* (1946)
　　*La fleur de l'âge* (1947)
　　*Marie of the Port* (1950)
　　*Juliette, or Key of Dreams* (1951)
　　*Thérèse Raquin* (1953)
　　*Air of Paris* (1954)
　　*The Country I Come From* (1956)
　　*Young Sinners* (1958)
　　*Wasteland* (1960)
　　*Chicken Feed for Little Birds* (1963)
　　*Three Rooms in Manhattan* (1965)
　　*Young Wolves* (1968)
　　*Law Breakers* (1971)
　　*The Marvelous Visit* (1974)

**To Be or Not to Be** (1942)

**Director:** Ernst Lubitsch
**Screenplay:** Edwin Justus Mayer, from an original story by Melchior Lengyel & Ernst Lubitsch
**Cinematographer:** Rudolph Maté
**Editor:** Dorothy Spencer
**Music:** Werner R. Heymann, Miklós Rózsa
**Production Designer:** Vincent Korda
**Costume Designer:** Irene Lentz
**Running time:** 99 minutes
**Format:** 35mm, in black and white
**Cast:** Carole Lombard (Maria Tura), Jack Benny (Joseph Tura), Robert Stack (Lt. Stanislav Sobinski), Felix Bressart (Greenberg), Lionel Atwill (Rawitch), Stanley Ridges (Professor Alexander Siletsky), Sig Ruman (Col. Ehrhardt), Tom Dugan (Bronski), Charles Halton (Producer Dobosh), George Lynn (Actor-Adjutant), Henry Victor (Capt. Schultz), Maude Eburne (Anna, Maria's maid), Halliwell Hobbes (Gen. Armstrong), Miles Mander (Major Cunningham), Rudolph Anders (Gestapo sergeant), Paul Barrett (Polish RAF pilot), Sven Hugo Borg (German soldier), Peter Caldwell (Wilhelm Kunze), Alec Craig (Scottish farmer without moustache), Helmut Dantine (Co-pilot), Jack Deery (Member of audience at performance of Hamlet), Leslie Denison (Captain), James Finlayson (Scottish farmer with moustache), James Gillette (Polish RAF pilot), Leyland Hodgson (Second reporter), Shep Houghton (German soldier), Olaf Hytten (Polonius in Warsaw), Charles Irwin (Reporter), John Kellogg (RAF flyer), Adolf E. Licho (Prompter), John Meredith (English wireless operator), Maurice Murphy (Polish RAF pilot), Russ Powell (Warsaw bystander), Frank Reicher (Polish official), Otto Reichow (Co-pilot), Gene Rizzi (Polish RAF pilot), Hans Schumm (Member of Special Investigations Squad), Stephen Soldi (Warsaw bystander), Count Stefenelli (Member of audience at performance of Hamlet), Roland Varno (Pilot), Ernö Verebes (Stage manager), Dorothy Vernon (Member of audience at performance of Hamlet), Armand "Curly" Wright (Makeup man), Wolfgang Zilzer (Man in bookstore)

**Ernst Lubitsch (1892–1947)**
    *Do the Dead Exist?* (1916)
    *Shoe Palace Pinkus* (1916)
    *When Four Do the Same* (1917)
    *The Eyes of the Mummy Ma* (1918)
    *Carmen* (1918)
    *Intoxication* (1919)
    *The Doll* (1919)
    *Meyer from Berlin* (1919)
    *My Wife, the Movie Star* (1919)
    *The Oyster Princess* (1919)
    *Madame DuBarry* (1919)

*Sumurun*, a.k.a. *One Arabian Night* (1920)
*Anna Boleyn*, a.k.a. *Deception* (1920)
*The Wild Cat* (1921)
*The Wife of the Pharaoh* (1922)
*The Flame* (1923)
*Rosita* (1923)
*The Marriage Circle* (1924)
*Three Women* (1924)
*Forbidden Paradise* (1924)
*Kiss Me Again* (1925)
*Lady Windermere's Fan* (1925)
*So This Is Paris* (1926)
*The Student Prince in Old Heidelberg* (1927)
*The Patriot* (1928)
*Eternal Love* (1929)
*The Love Parade* (1929)
*Monte Carlo* (1930)
*Paramount on Parade* (1930)
*The Smiling Lieutenant* (1931)
*Broken Lullaby* (1932)
*One Hour with You* (1932)
*Trouble in Paradise* (1932)
*Design for Living* (1933)
*The Merry Widow* (1934)
*Angel* (1937)
*Bluebeard's Eighth Wife* (1938)
*Ninotchka* (1939)
*The Shop Around the Corner* (1940)
*That Uncertain Feeling* (1941)
*To Be or Not to Be* (1942)
*Heaven Can Wait* (1943)
*A Royal Scandal* (1945)
*Cluny Brown* (1946)
*That Lady in Ermine* (1948)

## *Rashomon* (1950)

**Director:** Akira Kurosawa
**Screenplay:** Akira Kurosawa & Shinobu Hashimoto, from two stories by Ryunosuke
   Akutagawa: "Rashomon," from 1914, and "In a Grove," from 1921
**Cinematographer:** Kazuo Miyagawa
**Editor:** Akira Kurosawa
**Music:** Fumio Hayasaka
**Production Designer:** Takashi Matsuyama
**Running time:** 88 minutes
**Format:** 35mm, in black and white
**Cast:** Takashi Shimura (Kikori, the woodcutter), Minoru Chiaki (Tabi Hoshi, the
   priest), Kichijiro Ueda (The commoner), Toshiro Mifune (Tajomaru, the bandit),
   Machiko Kyo (Masako Kanazawa, the wife of the samurai), Masayuki Mori

(Takehiro Kanazawa, the samurai and husband), Noriko Honma (Miko, the medium), Daisuke Kato (Houben, the policeman)

**Akira Kurosawa (1910–98)**
*Sanshiro Sugata* (1943)
*The Most Beautiful* (1944)
*Sanshiro Sugata, Part II* (1945)
*The Men Who Tread on the Tiger's Tail* (1945)
*Those Who Make Tomorrow* (1946)
*No Regrets for Our Youth* (1946)
*One Wonderful Sunday* (1947)
*Drunken Angel* (1948)
*The Quiet Duel* (1949)
*Stray Dog* (1949)
*Rashomon* (1950)
*The Idiot* (1951)
*The Men Who Tread on the Tiger's Tail* (1952)
*Ikiru*, a.k.a. *To Live* (1952)
*Seven Samurai* (1954)
*Record of a Living Being*, a.k.a. *I Live in Fear* (1955)
*Throne of Blood* (1957)
*The Lower Depths* (1957)
*The Hidden Fortress* (1958)
*The Bad Sleep Well* (1960)
*Yojimbo* (1961)
*Sanjuro* (1962)
*High and Low* (1963)
*Red Beard* (1965)
*Dodeskaden* (1970)
*Dersu Uzala* (1975)
*Kagemusha*, a.k.a. *The Shadow Warrior* (1980)
*Ran* (1985)
*Dreams* (1990)
*Rhapsody in August* (1991)
*No, Not Yet!* (1993)

## *Pather Panchali* (1955)

**Director:** Satyajit Ray
**Screenplay:** Satyajit Ray, from the 1929 novel *Pather Panchali* (*Song of the Road*), by Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay
**Cinematographer:** Subrata Mitra
**Editor:** Dulal Dutta
**Music:** Ravi Shankar
**Production Designer:** Bansi Chandragupta
**Running time:** 125 minutes
**Format:** 35mm, in black and white
**Cast:** Kanu Banerjee (Harihar Roy), Karuna Banerjee (Sarbajaya Roy), Subir Banerjee (Apurba Roy [Apu]), Shampa "Runki" Banerjee (Durga Roy [child]),

Uma Das Gupta (Durga Roy [teenager]), Chunibala Devi (Indir Thakrun, the old aunt), Tulsi Chakraborty (Prasanna, schoolteacher), Reba Devi (Seja Thakrun), Aparna Devi (Nilmoni's wife), Haren Banerjee (Chinibas, sweet-seller), Nibhanani Devi (Dasi Thakurun), Rama Gangopadhaya (Ranu Mookerjee), Roma Ganguli (Roma), Binoy Mukherjee (Baidyanath Majumdar), Harimohan Nag (Doctor), Kshirod Roy (Priest), Rampada Das, Haridhan Nag, Suren Roy

**Satyajit Ray (1921–92)**
    *Pather Panchali* (1955)
    *Aparajito* (1956)
    *The Philosopher's Stone* (1958)
    *The Music Room* (1958)
    *The World of Apu* (1959)
    *The Goddess* (1960)
    *Three Daughters* (1961)
    *Kanchenjungha* (1962)
    *The Expedition* (1962)
    *The Big City* (1963)
    *The Lonely Wife* (1964)
    *The Coward and the Holy Man* (1965)
    *The Hero* (1966)
    *The Zoo* (1967)
    *The Adventures of Goopy and Bagha* (1968)
    *Days and Nights in the Forest* (1969)
    *The Adversary* (1970)
    *Company Limited* (1971)
    *Distant Thunder* (1973)
    *The Golden Fortress* (1974)
    *The Middleman* (1975)
    *The Chess Players* (1977)
    *The Elephant God* (1978)
    *Kingdom of Diamonds* (1980)
    *The Deliverance* (1981)
    *Home and the World* (1984)
    *Ganashatru* (1989)
    *Branches of the Tree* (1990)
    *The Stranger*, a.k.a. *The Visitor* (1991)

## *La notte* [*The Night*] (1961)

**Director:** Michelangelo Antonioni
**Screenplay:** Michelangelo Antonioni, Ennio Flaiano, Tonino Guerra
**Cinematographer:** Gianni Di Venanzo
**Editor:** Eraldo Da Roma
**Music:** Giorgio Gaslini
**Production Designer:** Piero Zuffi
**Running time:** 122 minutes
**Format:** 35mm, in black and white

**Cast:** Marcello Mastroianni (Giovanni Portano), Jeanne Moreau (Lidia), Monica Vitti (Valentina Gherardini), Bernhard Wicki (Tommaso Garani), Maria Pia Luzi (Unnamed patient), Rosy Mazzacurati (Rosy), Guido A. Marsan (Fanti), Vincenzo Corbella (Mr. Gherardini), Ugo Fortunati (Cesarino), Gitt Magrini (Signora Gherardini), Giorgio Negro, a.k.a. Gaetano "Tanino" Negroni (Roberto), Roberta Speroni (Beatrice), Umberto Eco (Man at party), Vittorio Bertolini, Valentino Bompiani, Roberto Danesi, Giansiro Ferrata, Giorgio Gaslini, Alceo Guatelli, Odile Jean, Ottiero Ottieri, Salvatore Quasimodo, Ettore Univelli, Eraldo Volontè

**Michelangelo Antonioni (1912–2007)**
*Story of a Love Affair* (1950)
*The Lady without Camelias* (1953)
*I vinti* [*The Vanquished*] (1953)
*Le amiche* [*The Girlfriends*] (1955)
*Il grido* [*The Outcry*, a.k.a. *The Cry*] (1957)
*L'avventura* [*The Adventure*] (1960)
*La notte* [*The Night*] (1961)
*L'eclisse* [*Eclipse*] (1962)
*Red Desert* (1964)
*Blow-Up* (1966)
*Zabriskie Point* (1970)
*The Passenger* (1975)
*The Oberwald Mystery* (1980)
*Identification of a Woman* (1982)
*Beyond the Clouds* (1995)

### *Winter Light* (1962)

**Director:** Ingmar Bergman
**Screenplay:** Ingmar Bergman
**Cinematographer:** Sven Nykvist
**Editor:** Ulla Ryghe
**Music:** Evald Andersson
**Production Designer:** P. A. Lundgren
**Costume Designer:** Mago (a.k.a. Max Goldstein)
**Running time:** 81 minutes
**Format:** 35mm, in black and white
**Cast:** Ingrid Thulin (Märta Lundberg, schoolteacher), Gunnar Björnstrand (Tomas Ericsson, pastor), Gunnel Lindblom (Karin Persson), Max von Sydow (Jonas Persson), Allan Edwall (Algot Frövik, sexton), Kolbjörn Knudsen (Knut Aronsson, warden), Olof Thunberg (Fredrik Blom, organist), Elsa Ebbesen (Magdalena Ledfors, widow)

**Ingmar Bergman (1918–2007)**
*Crisis* (1946)
*It Rains on Our Love* (1946)
*A Ship Bound for India* (1947)
*Music in Darkness* (1948)

*Port of Call* (1948)
*The Devil's Wanton*, a.k.a. *Prison* (1949)
*Thirst* (1949)
*To Joy* (1950)
*This Can't Happen Here* (1950)
*Summer Interlude* (1951)
*Secrets of Women* (1952)
*Summer with Monika* (1953)
*Sawdust and Tinsel* (1953)
*The Naked Night* (1953)
*A Lesson in Love* (1954)
*Dreams* (1955)
*Smiles of a Summer Night* (1955)
*The Seventh Seal* (1957)
*Wild Strawberries* (1957)
*Brink of Life* (1958)
*The Magician* (1958)
*The Virgin Spring* (1960)
*The Devil's Eye* (1960)
*Through a Glass Darkly* (1961)
*Winter Light* (1962)
*The Silence* (1963)
*All These Women* (1964)
*Persona* (1966)
*Hour of the Wolf* (1968)
*Shame* (1968)
*The Rite* (1969)
*The Passion of Anna* (1969)
*The Touch* (1971)
*Cries and Whispers* (1972)
*Scenes From a Marriage* (1973)
*The Magic Flute* (1975)
*Face to Face* (1976)
*The Serpent's Egg* (1977)
*Autumn Sonata* (1978)
*From the Life of the Marionettes* (1980)
*Fanny and Alexander* (1982)
*After the Rehearsal* (1984)
*Saraband* (2003)

### *Jules and Jim* (1962)

**Director:** François Truffaut
**Screenplay:** François Truffaut & Jean Gruault, from the 1953 novel of the same name by Henri-Pierre Roché
**Cinematographer:** Raoul Coutard
**Editor:** Claudine Bouché
**Music:** Georges Delerue; song "Le Tourbillon" ("The Whirlwind [of Life]"), by Boris Bassiak, sung by Jeanne Moreau
**Production Designer:** Fred Capel
**Costume Designer:** Fred Capel
**Running time:** 105 minutes
**Format:** 35mm, in black and white
**Cast:** Jeanne Moreau (Catherine), Oskar Werner (Jules), Henri Serre (Jim), Vanna Urbino (Gilberte, Jim's fiancée), Serge Rezvani, a.k.a. Boris Bassiak (Albert, Catherine's sometime lover), Marie Dubois (Thérèse, Jules's ex-girlfriend), Sabine Haudepin (Sabine, Jules and Catherine's daughter), Kate Noëlle (Birgitta), Anny Nelsen (Lucie), Christiane Wagner (Helga), Jean-Louis Richard (First customer in café), Michel Varesano (Second customer in café), Elen Bober (Mathilde), Pierre Fabre (Drunkard in café), Danielle Bassiak (Albert's companion), Bernard Largemain (Merlin), Elen Bober (Mathilde), Dominique Lacarrière (Woman), Michel Subor (Voice of the narrator)

**François Truffaut (1932–84)**
  *The 400 Blows* (1959)
  *Shoot the Piano Player* (1960)
  *Jules and Jim* (1962)
  *The Soft Skin* (1964)
  *Fahrenheit 451* (1965)
  *The Bride Wore Black* (1967)
  *Stolen Kisses* (1968)
  *Mississippi Mermaid* (1969)
  *The Wild Child* (1970)
  *Bed and Board* (1970)
  *Two English Girls* (1971)
  *Such a Gorgeous Kid Like Me* (1972)
  *Day for Night* (1973)
  *The Story of Adele H.* (1975)
  *Small Change* (1976)
  *The Man Who Loved Women* (1977)
  *The Green Room* (1978)
  *Love on the Run* (1979)
  *The Last Metro* (1980)
  *The Woman Next Door* (1981)
  *Confidentially Yours* (1983)

## *8½* (1963)

**Director:** Federico Fellini
**Screenplay:** Federico Fellini, Ennio Flaiano, Tullio Pinelli, Brunello Rondi
**Cinematographer:** Gianni Di Venanzo
**Editor:** Leo Cattozzo
**Music:** Nino Rota
**Production Designer:** Piero Gherardi
**Costume Designer:** Piero Gherardi
**Running time:** 138 minutes
**Format:** 35mm, in black and white
**Cast:** Marcello Mastroianni (Guido Anselmi, a film director), Anouk Aimée (Luisa Anselmi, Guido's wife), Elisabetta Catalano (Matilde, Luisa's sister), Mark Herron (Luisa's suitor), Rossella Falk (Rossella, Luisa's best friend and Guido's confidante), Francesco Rigamonti (A friend of Luisa's), Sandra Milo (Carla, Guido's mistress), Claudia Cardinale (Claudia, a movie star Guido casts as his Ideal Woman), Mino Doro (Claudia's agent), Mario Tarchetti (Claudia's press representative), Simonetta Simeoni (Young girl), Guido Alberti (Pace, a film producer), Mario Conocchia (Mario Conocchia, Guido's production assistant), Annie Gorassini (The film producer's girlfriend), Bruno Agostini (Bruno Agostini, the production director), Cesarino Miceli Picardi (Cesarino, the production supervisor), Jean Rougeul (Carini Daumier, a film critic), Mario Pisu (Mario Mezzabotta, Guido's friend), Barbara Steele (Gloria Morin, Mezzabotta's new young girlfriend), Madeleine LeBeau (Madeleine, a French actress), Neil Robinson (The French actress's agent), Caterina Boratto (Mysterious lady in the hotel), Eddra Gale (La Saraghina, a prostitute), Eugene Walter (American journalist), Gilda Dahlberg (The American journalist's wife), Mary Indovino (Maya, the clairvoyant), Ian Dallas (Maurice, Maya's assistant), Edy Vessel (Mannequin), Yvonne Casadei (Jacqueline Bonbon), Giuditta Rissone (Guido's mother), Annibale Ninchi (Guido's father), Marco Gemini (Guido as a boy), Nadia Sanders (Nadine), Georgia Simmons (Guido's grandmother), Maria Raimondi (One of Guido's aunts), Marisa Colomber (Another of Guido's aunts), Titop Masini (The Cardinal), Frazier Rippy (Lay secretary), Hazel Rogers (Negress), Giulio Paradisi, Mathilda Calnan, Giulio Calì, Franco Caracciolo, Elisabetta Cini, Dina De Santis, Eva Gioia, Riccardo Guglielmi, John Karlsen, Palma Mangini, John Stacy, Maria Tedeschi, Roberta Valli

**Federico Fellini (1920–93)**
  *Variety Lights* (1950)
  *The White Sheik* (1952)
  *I vitelloni* [*The Young and the Passionate*] (1953)
  *La strada* [*The Road*] (1954)
  *Il bidone* [*The Swindle*] (1955)
  *The Nights of Cabiria* (1957)
  *La dolce vita* [*The Sweet Life*] (1959)
  *8½* (1963)
  *Juliet of the Spirits* (1965)

*Fellini Satyricon* (1969)
*The Clowns* (1970)
*Roma* (1972)
*Amarcord* [*I Remember*] (1973)
*Casanova* (1976)
*Orchestra Rehearsal* (1979)
*City of Women* (1980)
*And the Ship Sails On* (1983)
*Ginger and Fred* (1985)
*Intervista* [*Interview*] (1987)
*The Voice of the Moon* (1990)

## *Memories of Underdevelopment* (1968)

**Director:** Tomás Gutiérrez Alea
**Screenplay:** Tomás Gutiérrez Alea & Edmundo Desnoes, from Desnoes' 1962 novel
  *Inconsolable Memories*
**Cinematographer:** Ramón F. Suárez
**Editor:** Nelson Rodríguez
**Music:** Leo Brouwer
**Production Designer:** Julio Matilla
**Costume Designer:** Elba Pérez
**Running time:** 97 minutes
**Format:** 35mm, in black and white
**Cast:** Sergio Corrieri (Sergio Carmona Mendoyo), Beatriz Ponchora (Laura), Daisy Granádos (Elena), Eslinda Núñez (Noemí), Omar Valdés (Pablo), René de la Cruz (Elena's brother), Yolanda Farr, Ofelia González, Jose Gil Abad, Daniel Jordan, Luis López, Rafael Sosa, Edmundo Desnoes (Himself), Jack Gelber (Himself), Tomás Gutiérrez Alea (Himself)

**Tomás Gutiérrez Alea (1928–96)**
  *Il sogno de Giovanni Bassain* (1953)
  *Stories of the Revolution* (1960)
  *Twelve Chairs* (1962)
  *Cumbite* (1964)
  *Death of a Bureaucrat* (1966)
  *Memories of Underdevelopment* (1968)
  *A Cuban Fight Against Demons* (1971)
  *One Way or Another* (1974)
  *The Last Supper* (1976)
  *The Survivors* (1979)
  *Up to a Point* (1983)
  *Letters from the Park* (1988)
  *Strawberry and Chocolate* (1994)
  *Guantánamera* (1995)

## *Apocalypse Now* (1979)

**Director:** Francis Ford Coppola
**Screenplay:** Francis Ford Coppola, John Milius, & Michael Herr, based on the 1899 novella *Heart of Darkness*, by Joseph Conrad
**Cinematographer:** Vittorio Storaro
**Editors:** Lisa Fruchtman, Gerald B. Greenberg, Walter Murch
**Music:** Carmine Coppola, Francis Ford Coppola; Jim Morrison & The Doors ("This Is the End")
**Production Designers:** Dean Tavoularis, Angelo Graham, Bob Nelson
**Sound Designers:** Walter Murch, Mark Berger, Richard Beggs, Nat Boxer
**Running time:** 153 minutes; 202 min (Redux)
**Format:** 70mm (initial release; later released in 35mm), in color
**Cast:** Marlon Brando (Col. Walter E. Kurtz), Robert Duvall (Lt. Col. Bill Kilgore), Martin Sheen (Capt. Benjamin L. Willard), Frederic Forrest (Jay "Chef" Hicks), Albert Hall (Chief Phillips), Sam Bottoms (Lance B. Johnson), Larry Fishburne (Tyrone "Clean" Miller), Dennis Hopper (Photojournalist), Harrison Ford (Col. Lucas), G. D. Spradlin (Gen. Corman), Scott Glenn (Lt. Richard M. Colby), Cynthia Wood (Playmate of the Year), Glenn Walken (Lt. Carlsen), Herb Rice (Roach), Richard Marks (Narrator), Christian Marquand (Hubert de Marais, Redux version only), Aurore Clément (Roxanne Sarrault, Redux version only), Michel Patton (Philippe de Marais, Redux version only), Frank Villard (Gaston de Marais, Redux version only), David Olivier (Christian de Marais, Redux version only), Chrystel Le Pelletier (Claudine, Redux version only), Robert Julian (The tutor, Redux version only), Yvon LeSeaux (Sgt. Le Fevre, Redux version only), Roman Coppola (Francis de Marais, Redux version only), Gian-Carlo Coppola (Gilles de Marais, Redux version only)

**Francis Ford Coppola (born 1939)**

*Dementia 13* (1963)
*You're a Big Boy Now* (1966)
*Finian's Rainbow* (1968)
*The Rain People* (1969)
*The Godfather* (1972)
*The Conversation* (1974)
*The Godfather Part II* (1974)
*Apocalypse Now* (1979)
*One From the Heart* (1982)
*The Outsiders* (1983)
*Rumble Fish* (1983)
*The Cotton Club* (1984)
*Peggy Sue Got Married* (1986)
*Gardens of Stone* (1987)
*Tucker: The Man and His Dream* (1988)
*The Godfather Part III* (1990)
*Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992)
*Jack* (1996)

*The Rainmaker* (1997)
*Youth without Youth* (2007)
*Tetro* (2009)
*Twixt* (2011)
*Distant Vision* (2015)

## *Breaker Morant* (1980)

**Director:** Bruce Beresford
**Screenplay:** Bruce Beresford, Jonathan Hardy, & David Stevens, from the 1978 play of the same name by Kenneth G. Ross, with additional material taken from the 1973 novel *The Breaker*, by Kit Denton
**Cinematographer:** Donald McAlpine
**Editor:** William M. Anderson
**Music:** Phil Cuneen, Harry Harbord Morant (composer of the song "At Last")
**Production Designer:** David Copping
**Costume Designer:** Anna Senior
**Running time:** 107 minutes
**Format:** 35mm, in color
**Cast:** Edward Woodward (Lt. Harry Harbord "Breaker" Morant), Bryan Brown (Lt. Peter Handcock), Lewis Fitz-Gerald (Lt. George Ramsdale Witton), Jack Thompson (Maj. J. F. Thomas), John Waters (Capt. Alfred Taylor), Rod Mullinar (Maj. Charles Bolton), Charles "Bud" Tingwell (Lt. Col. H. C. Denny), Terence Donovan (Capt. Simon Hunt), Alan Cassell (Lord Horatio Kitchener), Vincent Ball (Col. Ian "Johnny" Hamilton), Ray Meagher (Sgt. Maj. Drummond), Chris Haywood (Cpl. Sharp), Russell Kiefel (Christiaan Botha), Rob Steele (Capt. Robertson), Chris Smith (Sgt. Cameron), Bruno Knez (Rev. H. V. C. Hess), John Pfitzner (Boer leader), Frank Wilson (Dr. Johnson), Michael Procanin (Visser), Ray Ball (Court reporter), Wayne Bell (Lt. Reed), Halifa Cisse (Black guide), Norman Currer (Boer singer), Bridget Cornish (Hunt's sister), Judy Dick (Mrs. Shiels), Barbara West (Mrs. Vanderberg), Ria Erskine (Boer girl), Ian Gray (Bandmaster Thomas), Sylvia Horseman (Boer pianist), Dick Henderson (Capt. Nicholson), Alan Lovett (Scots sentry), Trevor Mann (Bandmaster Little), Jon Nicholls (Lt. Baxter), Peter Osborn (Minister), Ron Peterson (Feist), Don Quin (Witton's father), Maria Reed (Boer girl), Ron Rodger (English orderly), Nellie Seidel (Boer girl), Laurie Walton (Judge advocate), Hank Bernard (Large Boer), Elspeth Radford (Handcock's wife)

**Bruce Beresford (born 1940)**
*The Adventures of Barry McKenzie* (1972)
*Barry McKenzie Holds His Own* (1974)
*Side by Side* (1975)
*Don's Party* (1976)
*The Getting of Wisdom* (1978)
*Money Movers* (1978)
*Breaker Morant* (1980)
*The Club* (1980)

*Puberty Blues* (1981)
*Tender Mercies* (1983)
*King David* (1985)
*The Fringe Dwellers* (1986)
*Crimes of the Heart* (1986)
*Her Alibi* (1989)
*Driving Miss Daisy* (1989)
*Mister Johnson* (1990)
*Black Robe* (1991)
*Rich in Love* (1993)
*A Good Man in Africa* (1994)
*Silent Fall* (1994)
*Last Dance* (1996)
*Paradise Road* (1997)
*Sydney—A Story of a City* (1999)
*Double Jeopardy* (1999)
*Bride of the Wind* (2001)
*Evelyn* (2002)
*The Contract* (2006)
*Mao's Last Dancer* (2009)
*Peace, Love, & Misunderstanding* (2011)
*Mr. Church* (2016)
*Ladies in Black* (2018)

# A Guide to Film Analysis

Many of us are used to sitting back in the dark and viewing a film uncritically; indeed, most Hollywood films are constructed so as to render "invisible" the carefully constructed (or edited) nature of the medium. Furthermore, because a film is composed of visual, aural, and linguistic components that are manipulated in numerous ways, it is a challenge to take apart the totality of the film experience and to interpret how that experience was assembled—and *why* it was assembled in a particular way.

In the paragraphs to come the reader will find brief explanations of ways in which to analyze the language of film. Although this list is not comprehensive, it does contain a lot of information. If film interpretation is new to the reader, he or she will not be able to keep track of all of these elements while viewing any one film—this is an acquired skill. One should concentrate at first on a few aspects that seem to offer the most opportunity for critical reading.

If one is viewing the film only once, one should try to take notes in shorthand while watching. Arrows can be used to note camera angles and camera movement; quick sketches can be used to note shot composition and elements of the *mise-en-scène*. As soon as possible after viewing the film, one should write out one's impressions, noting the most important elements. If one intends to write about the film and will be seeing it again, one should take minimal notes the first time through (at the same time as one registers important scenes to which one wants to return).

When analyzing a film as a historical document, one should keep in mind the film's contemporary audience and author-director. One's own personal reaction to the film may serve as a starting point, but one needs to convert this reaction into historical analysis—i.e., how is the viewer different from, yet similar to, the historical audience/author-director? What has changed and what has stayed the same? One should also remember the technological changes that have taken place over the years: one should keep in mind what audiences would have expected at the time and how filmmakers once used the technology at their disposal.

It is especially important to consider substantial changes in the manner of presentation if one will be watching the film on a television set. One should be aware that most Hollywood films made after the early 1950s have an "aspect ratio" (height and width ratio) different from that of television screens. Most videotapes of these films have been altered by the "pan and scan" method, which dramatically changes elements such as shot composition and camera movement. Videotapes that are "widescreen" preserve the correct aspect ratio. Most DVDs now come in both "standard" (altered) and "widescreen" format, or only in the correct aspect ratio, and most laser disks use the correct aspect ratio. If possible, one should find a format that has not altered the aspect ratio.

*R. J. Cardullo*

## DIGGING DEEPER: LEVELS OF MEANING

Movies are entertainment. Movies are documents of their time and place. Movies are artistic forms of self-expression. Movies we see at theaters, on television, or at home are typically *narrative* films. They tell stories about characters going through experiences. But what are they really about? What is the *content* of a film?

Recounting the plot of a movie, telling what happens, is the simplest way to explain it to someone else. But this is neither a film *review* nor a film *analysis*. It is merely a synopsis with which anyone else who sees or has seen the movie will likely agree. This level of content may be called the **referential**, since it refers directly to events that occur in the story and possibly to some aspects of the story that are merely implied. Most films, however, can be analyzed more thoroughly to reveal deeper levels of meaning.

A *review* (ca. 400–1,200 words) typically includes personal impressions and evaluations of a movie's content and techniques. A good review may be highly subjective yet still touch on topics that might be explored in more detail in a longer, formal analysis. An *analysis* (ca. 1,200–7,500 words) attempts to determine how the film uses various cinematic techniques and elements of film form or narrative strategy to make viewers react in a certain way, and tries, finally, to discover why the film makes viewers come away with certain opinions about it. Serious criticism, whether essays written for magazines, journals, books, or class assignments, attempts to analyze films rather than merely review them or provide simple descriptions of what happens. An analysis requires some reflective thought about the film, and usually benefits from multiple viewings as well as outside research.

Most films include lines of dialogue and obvious developments of character that explicitly communicate meaning to the viewers. **Explicit** content is perhaps some sort of "moral of the story" or sociopolitical attitude that the filmmaker is expressing directly through the mouths and actions of the characters. A slightly deeper level of interpretation is **implicit** (or subtextual) content, which may be less obvious but can still be inferred from seeing how the characters change, grow, or develop in the course of the film. Issues and ideas dealing with general human relations (rather than those specific to individual characters) may be fairly easy to recognize but are not explicitly stated by the characters. Moreover, different viewers might interpret the same action or event in different ways, depending upon their own experiences and expectations.

Implicit, explicit, and referential interpretations are based entirely on the film as a self-contained work, on "internal evidence." It is also possible to find richer meaning in a film, meaning deduced from knowing something about its creators and the time and place in which it was created—meaning deduced, that is, from "external evidence" that is not possible to identify exclusively from the film itself. Sometimes this type of meaning is intentional on the part of the filmmakers, and at other times it may be unconsciously incorporated into the story. Analyzing a film on this level is an instance of treating the film as a *symptom* of a much greater influence than the simple dramatic concerns, on the part of the director and screenwriter, for the characters and their actions. A **symptomatic** interpretation looks at the film as part of the broad context of society, reflecting and illustrating themes prevalent in the culture, in the time and place it was made, and possibly in the creator's personal experience. This

level of interpretation tries to recognize symbolic content, identifying characters and situations as *metaphors* for something else, or possibly seeing the entire story as an *allegory* about something else.

FIGURING IT ALL OUT: APPROACHES TO INTERPRETATION

Identifying the film's content, whether explicit, implicit, or symptomatic, is an interpretation of its **ideational** meaning. It is up to viewers and critics to determine whether a film is effective at achieving some or all of its intentions, and sometimes even what those intentions might be. Analysis from a variety of approaches—all of them ultimately capped by a humanistic perspective, as opposed to an ideologically politicized one (feminist, Marxist or class-based, postcolonial, racial, homosexual, etc.)—can help a viewer realize just what a film is trying to do and to appreciate it more, whether or not it suits one's taste.

Once people realized that the cinema could do much more than provide simple entertainment, a variety of theories and approaches were developed to help analyze films in order to understand how they created responses in viewers and just what their narratives might ultimately mean. Different approaches examine different aspects of a film for different reasons.

A **formalist** approach looks at the film itself, its structure or form. Thus, while other approaches might use some degree of external evidence to analyze a film, a formalist approach will focus primarily on internal evidence. This approach might analyze how the way in which the narrative is presented forces the viewer to see things at certain times, and in such a way, that his reaction to them would be different if they were presented some other way. A *narrative* analysis will examine how a film employs various narrative elements (such as character, setting, repetition/variation, chronological structure, etc.) to convey meaning to the viewer. Analysis of specific formal *techniques* might concentrate on a film's use of *mise-en-scène*, photographic composition, camera movement, editing choice, sound in relation to the image, etc., noting the effect of those techniques on the viewer's perception of a scene and interpretation of what it may mean.

A **realist** approach examines how a film represents "reality." Some films attempt to make techniques "invisible" to viewers so that realistic characters and situations are always the primary focus. Others attempt to use cinematic techniques to create a certain type of intense psychological reality that the filmmaker wants the audience to experience—love, aging, insanity, drug addiction, etc. Some films are thus more concerned with creating emotional moods and impressions than with depicting a traditionally plotted story with an obvious beginning, middle, and end. These films may be attempting to convey a type of reality that is important to their creators, hoping that viewers will comprehend it, but the use of unconventional techniques and structure may require a concerted effort at understanding on the part of a viewer—multiple viewings, for example, or even an explanation on the part of the filmmaker. Look, for example, at the unusual films written or directed by Charlie Kaufman, such as *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004), *Synecdoche, New York* (2008), *Adaptation* (2002), and *Being John Malkovich* (1999). Earlier films that might benefit

from this approach to analysis include Alain Resnais's *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961) and Robert Wiene's *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920).

A **contextualist** approach to analysis always considers a film as part of some broader context. This can be society at large (as in the aforementioned **symptomatic** interpretation); the particular culture, time, and place in which the film was created (a **culturalist** approach); or the director's personal life and previous body of work (an **auteurist** approach, which assumes that the director is the "author" of a film—that it is the product of a single filmmaker's imaginative talent, singular sensibility, and unifying vision, as evidenced in his cinematic *oeuvre* to date). The **nationalist** approach investigates and discusses films in terms of their national character. The premise behind this approach is that different film cultures emerge with different characteristics in different nations, and, therefore, one must determine the social, cultural, and political conditions that characterize the culture and how these conditions manifest themselves in what is portrayed on screen. A **psychological** approach often identifies plot or characters elements by using the theories of psychologists like Freud or Jung in a search for sexual symbolism, the treatment of the subconscious, representations of the id, ego, and superego, etc. A **generic** approach looks at a film as a representative of a genre, comparing it with other films from the same genre and finding meaning by identifying shared motifs or variations from the expected formula. This approach is especially useful when a film intentionally subverts or inverts various elements of traditional generic formulas. A generic analysis often benefits from a wider-reaching, contextual approach, since a substantial number of genre films (especially science-fiction films and westerns, but also others such as war films and historical dramas) incorporate intentional metaphors and symptomatic content relating to contemporary society at the time they were made.

Another way to examine a film in a certain context is to chronicle its **reception** by audiences and critics over the years, possibly in conjunction with one or more of the other approaches noted above. Some films were huge popular *and* critical successes when originally released, but were all but forgotten within a few years or perhaps a decade or two. Other films were virtually ignored when they first came out, but gradually gained viewer and critical acclaim to the point that they are now considered time-honored masterpieces or beloved favorites. It is possible that a film originally rejected by critics but popular with the viewing public gradually reversed such a position over the decades, so that now it is critically respected but largely disliked by the general public. Still other films provoke a certain amount of controversy, falling in and out of favor from one decade to another as popular or critical tastes change. Historical events and general shifts in popular attitudes, as well as cultural trends, over time may be related to such changes in a film's status. A variation on this survey of response to a film over the years is the **genetic** approach, which follows a film through all stages of its creation and release. This approach will examine and evaluate various drafts of the script and memos about changes or revisions during production, continuing through various cuts of the film made for preview audiences, theatrical release, re-edited rereleases, television and video editions, and later "definitive" director's cuts. Such an analysis may provide valuable insight into the artistic process and its relationship to commercial considerations, as

well as make suggestions about the tastes, values, and general sophistication of target audiences.

A viewer can use any one or combination of these critical approaches to try to figure out just what a filmmaker is trying to say or imply in a work. Different approaches may embrace or totally ignore other approaches to come up with similar or completely opposite ideas about what a film really means. There may be as many different interpretations of a film as there are critics, but one thing is certain: examining a film from a variety of approaches could reveal aspects of its meaning that one never even considered while watching it for the first time. Of course, trying to use every approach to analyze a film would result in a book-length study. Any particular film may lend itself most easily to analysis through one or two specific approaches, with perhaps some consideration by means of one additional approach. In the end, writing a critical analysis, whether it is three pages long or twenty-five pages, requires narrowing down the scope of one's coverage to only what seems most important about the film and most rewarding to discuss.

## PREPARING TO WRITE ABOUT A FILM

Each writer may have an individualized approach to responding to, and writing about, a film, but all writers will work more effectively if they prepare to view the film *and* to write about it. Therefore, to recap, one should aim to:

*Investigate background information* on the film one is writing about, such as the film's historical, cultural, and stylistic contexts, or its production history. This kind of background material can prove useful in one's analysis, evaluation, and general understanding of the film because, even if one's assignment does not ask that one explicitly write about the film in relation to the era in which it was made, knowledge of that history will deepen one's critical awareness of other aspects of the film. Examining the film as a process that has been shaped by different types of events—historical, contemporary, and individual or personal—can lead to one's having one's own ideas about the film.

*Explore the individual and collaborative factors* that affected the film's final form so that one can better understand the aesthetic and cinematic decisions the director made. The final images one views on screen come from an extended creative process, involving the influence of the director, screenwriter, and cinematographer (among others), as well as the relevant conditions during the making of the film (including financing, casting, weather, illness, etc.).

*Find out who the film's director is and what other films he has made*. By viewing some of the director's other films, one will have a better understanding of the film one is writing about as one develops a larger picture of the themes that have inspired the director, the genres and techniques he has preferred, and the consistency (or lack thereof) in storytelling method over the course of his career.

*Be selective in one's approach to elements of film composition,* as production includes everything from lighting and sound, to wardrobe and editing, to special effects. The more specific the focus, the closer one can analyze one's chosen area of

investigation and relate that analysis to a thesis about the particular cinematic work as a whole.

***Think comprehensively about the film's story and characters.*** Cinematic images do not merely represent a single dimension of a subject, such as just the narrative or just the characters. All feature films tell stories and have characters, but the way in which the narratives and their protagonists are presented to us can vary greatly in style, tone, and technique from film to film and filmmaker to filmmaker. Film analysis is concerned with *how* these various elements help tell the story and create the characters.

***Watch films with critical awareness,*** just as one would actively read and annotate a book one was preparing to write about; one should make note of a film's striking features and ask relevant questions. After an initial viewing, if possible one should watch the film a second time, taking notes and letting one's general, preliminary questions evolve into more specific ones. If one is writing about a film that one can view only once, the initial groundwork will be essential to the success of one's paper. One should be aware, too, that doing research beforehand can play a significant role in freeing the viewer to experience the film with purposeful observation and informed note-taking.

***Guide oneself to a focused topic*** through one's questions, and continue to narrow one's approach as one decides which questions can be grouped together under a shared idea concerning the theme of the film, the function of its characters, or the nature of its technical and formal features.


## QUESTIONS TO ASK IN ANY CRITICAL ASSESSMENT

The following questions should help in one's critical evaluation of a film for an assigned essay. One should keep in mind, again, that sophisticated film, like sophisticated literature, requires more than one viewing to begin to appreciate its purpose beyond that of merely telling a story.

As one views a film, one should consider how the cuts, camera angles, shots, and movement work to create particular meanings. Think about how they establish space, privilege certain characters, suggest relationships, emphasize themes, or forward the narrative. In addition to shot distances, angles, editing, and camera movement, one should note details of the narrative, setting, characters, lighting, props, costume, and sound.

Ask oneself the following questions as one analyzes any film:

### Background

Who is the writer of the film? Has the screenplay been adapted from another work? Who is the director? When was the film made? How might industrial, social, and economic factors have influenced the film's making? Did conditions in the filmmaking industry at the time limit the way in which the film could represent

particular subjects? Does the film follow or critique the dominant ideologies of its period? Does it reflect and even shape particular cultural tensions?

## Form/Narrative/Perspective

What "happens" in the plot? In considering the narrative structure, note whether the film follows a standard chronological narrative, and how time is used. (That is, how is the story told: linearly; with flashbacks or flash-forwards; or episodically?) What are the key moments and how are they established? What are the climaxes and anti-climaxes? How far ahead is the audience in understanding what is happening to the characters than the characters themselves are? What propels the story forward? What is the pace of the narrative? How do earlier parts of the narrative set up later parts? Where do the key emotive moments occur—that is, when the audience is frightened, enraged, enraptured, avenged, etc.—and how has the narrative helped to establish these emotions on the part of the audience? Note when there is a *change of knowledge* (when characters or audience members become aware of new information) that shifts the *hierarchy of knowledge* (the relative amount of knowledge characters have, as opposed to what knowledge the audience has). Does the narrative have a coherence or unity, or does it leave the audience feeling unfulfilled or confused?

Is the film told, in general, from a particular character's point of view, or is it "objective"? Is the film's perspective primarily intellectual or emotional, visionary or realistic? Within the film, are particular shots shown from this or that character's point of view (in a "subjective shot"), and how does the camera technically reinforce such a point of view? On whom is the audience meant to be focusing at particular moments?

What does the title mean in relation to the film as a whole? Consider alternative titles and why this particular title was chosen; also, consider any ambiguities in the title. The opening credits themselves establish a tone and often are used to foreshadow events, themes, or metaphors, so one should pay careful attention from the very beginning of any film. How are the opening credits presented? Are they connected to the film's meaning in any way?

Why does the film's action begin in the way that it does? Are there any linguistic or visual motifs that are repeated during the film? What purpose do they serve? Which three or four sequences are the most important in the film? Why?

Is sound used in any vivid ways to enhance the film's drama, heighten tension, disorient the viewer, etc.? How does the film use color or light-and-dark to suggest tone and mood in different scenes? Are there any striking uses of perspective (through camera angle or placement)? How does this relate to the meaning of the scene in question?

How and when are scenes cut? Is there any meaningful pattern to the way the editing is carried out? What specific scene constitutes the film's climax? How does this scene resolve the central issue of the film?

Does the film leave any disunities or loose ends at its conclusion? If so, what does this suggest? Why does the film conclude on this particular image and not some other one?

## Theme

What is the film's central theme, idea, or generative principle? That is, from an intellectual perspective, what is the motivating force behind the film? Does the film present a clear-cut point-of-view on its particular subject? How so, and to what end? Are there any aspects of the film's theme that are left ambiguous at the conclusion? Why? How does this film measure up to literary texts you have read on the same subject?

## Characterization

Who are the central characters? How are minor characters used? Are characters thinly or fully drawn, and why? Who in the audience is meant to relate to which characters, and what sort of emotion (fear, pleasure, anxiety) are audience members meant to feel on account of this identification? Is there a clear-cut hero or villain, or do these figures remain ambivalent in the film? What values do the characters represent, and do the characters change in the course of the action? Are the characters meant to play a particular "type" and do they play *against* type at any time? Do different characters use different kinds of language? Do certain characters speak through their silences?

What is the acting style of the performers: mannered ("classical"); intense and psychologically driven ("Method"); or less affected and more "natural"? Do particular actors have their own recognizable style or type, and how do the filmmakers integrate the various acting styles of different performers? What expectations do audiences have of "star" actors? Do the stars, in this instance, fulfill or challenge the expectations of the audience as they perform their roles?

## *Mise-en-scène*/Montage

Is the setting realistic or stylized? What atmosphere does the setting suggest? Do particular objects in the setting serve a symbolic function? Does the setting itself serve such a function?

How are the characters costumed and made up? What does their clothing or makeup reveal about their social standing, ethnicity, nationality, gender, or age? How do costume and makeup convey character? How are characters contrasted by means of costume?

What in the film is well-illuminated and what is in shadow? How does the lighting scheme shape our perception of character, space, or mood? How are colors used? Is there a pattern or scheme to the use of color? That is, is color used symbolically in the film?

What shot distances are used? Does one notice a movement from longer to closer shots? When in particular are the various shot distances used (e.g., the opening of a scene, during a conversation, etc.)? What purposes do the long shots, medium shots, and close-ups serve?

How do camera angles function? How do they shape the audience's view of characters, spaces, or actions?

How do camera movements function? What information do they provide about characters, objects, and locations? Do the camera movements guide the viewer's eye toward particular details? Do they align the viewer's perspective with that of a character?

Editing ("cuts") creates continuities (or discontinuities), juxtapositions, and overall narrative structure in a film. What types of cuts are used? How are the cuts used: to establish rhythm, shift the viewer between characters, create transitions between spaces, mark the passage of time? Does the film's editing comment on the relationships between characters or spaces?

What is the purpose of the film's music? How does it direct our attention within the image? How does it shape our interpretation of the image? How are sound (including dialogue) and sound effects used, in general, in the film?

Was the film shot in a studio, on a soundstage, or was it shot on location? How is the setting integrated into the action, both the larger background of that setting and its smaller foreground (including props)? How is the setting used in composing shots (verticals and horizontals, windows and doors, shades and mirrors, etc.)? How do particular settings (a vast mountain range, a cluttered urban setting) function as signs in order to convey narrative or psychological information to the viewer?

# Topics for Writing and Discussion

1. Discuss the extent to which the "serious" films in this book subvert or re-deploy the following "popular" narrative elements: melodrama, sentimentality, romance, and comedy or comic relief. Discuss also the extent to which some, or all, of these elements are embodied in such a "popular" movie as *The Gold Rush*.

2. Using examples from your own viewing experience as well as the films discussed in this book, compare and contrast the commercial-industrial model of cinema with the aesthetic-artisanal model. Be sure to include in your answer a consideration of the following issues: globalization and cultural hybridity versus cultural specificity; federal subsidy versus private financing; film as a "total work of art" versus film as the most financially profitable form of entertainment; professional acting versus amateur or nonprofessional performance; and *auteurist* vision versus assembly-line production.

3. "The Hollywood film has traditionally been one of action and clear-cut values, the European film one of character and moral ambiguities, and the Japanese film one concerned with the circumstances that surround a human being." Discuss the extent to which *To Be or Not to Be* and *Apocalypse Now* are, or aren't, exceptions to this rule. As you compose your answer, be sure also to refer to the Japanese film discussed in *Required Screening*, *Rashomon*, as well as the European films treated in this book: *La notte* and *Jules and Jim*, for example.

4. Comment upon the use of the child as a dramatic device in *Pather Panchali*. How are children characterized in this film, as opposed to conventional or commercial movies, and how are they deployed to advance the "adult" narrative?

5. Discuss the extent to which visual style creates thematic meaning in the following two films: *Jules and Jim* and *Battleship Potemkin*.

6. Discuss the significance of the titles of four of the following eight films: *The Last Laugh*, *The Blue Angel*, *To Be or Not to Be*, *La notte*, *Winter Light*, *Jules and Jim*, *8½*, and *Apocalypse Now.*

7. Discuss the extent to which documentary principles influenced the conception and shooting of such an otherwise fictional works as *Memories of Underdevelopment*—which was made a former documentary filmmaker.

8. Describe the degree to which two of the following four films—*The Last Laugh*, *The Blue Angel*, *Daybreak*, and *Winter Light*—can, or cannot, be considered tragedies, if tragedy (as opposed to pathos) is understood as a form characterized by individual pain or suffering leading to sacrificial

decay, defeat, death, or destruction; by fear, misery, and terror; by exceptionality and isolation; by an inevitability or irremediableness that may take on metaphysical implications; by enervation and catharsis; and by internal division on the part of the protagonist, culminating in fatal error and finally self-awareness or "recognition."

9. Compare and contrast the following sets of characters or relationships: the Doorman from *The Last Laugh* and Professor Rath from *The Blue Angel*; the love triangles in *Jules and Jim* and *La notte*, or the love triangles in *Daybreak* and *Rashomon*.

10. In the movies, point of view tends to be less rigorous than in fiction, for fiction films tend to fall naturally into the omniscient form. Using examples from the films treated in this book, discuss how omniscient narration—as opposed to first-person, third-person, or objective narration—is almost inevitable in fiction film.

11. Comment, from a social as well as an artistic point of view, on the relationship between the rise of the Internet and the decline worldwide in the number of movie theaters. Related to this question, how do changes in technology affect the nature of film and of film spectatorship?

12. What should one study at university if one wishes oneself to become a creator of film art?

13. Elaborate on the following statement: "Every film is a fiction film."

14. What is the relationship between filmgoing and visual perception in general?

15. What are the implications of the replacement of reel (acetate) film by digital film?

16. What can film do that other art forms cannot do, or what can film do better than other art forms? That is, what makes movies "cinematic"? What separates film from theater and from literature? Use examples from the films treated in this book to illustrate your points.

17. Is film at its best a record of reality, a realistic medium, or a way to alter reality, a formalist and even fantasy-driven medium? Related to this question, are movies products of their culture, or do they shape that culture?

18. Discuss the extent to which *La notte* treats the following themes: the rejection of, or distrust in, language; the difficulty, if not impossibility, of romantic love in the modern world; the metaphysical, philosophical, or existential problems of middle- to upper-middle-class characters, as opposed to the socioeconomic problems of lower-class characters.

19. The following seven films are adaptations from fiction or drama: *The Blue Angel*, *Rashomon*, *Pather Panchali*, *Jules and Jim*, *Memories of Underdevelopment*, *Apocalypse Now*, and *Breaker Morant*. Read the original source of at least two of these films and then describe why you prefer it to the film version made of it, or vice versa. As you compose your answer, consider which of the following two questions you would choose to ask, and why: "How does the adaptation of fiction and drama for the

screen serve the cinema?"; or, "How does such film adaptation serve literature and the theater?"

20. What is the difference between film analysis and film criticism? What is the difference between film history and film theory? Which is more important, film theory or film criticism? Are they equally important, or equally unimportant, in the end?

21. Discuss the role of religion—that is, how it impacts the film's drama—in *Winter Light*, which features a pastor as its major character.

22. Pier Paolo Pasolini has maintained that the cinema is a vehicle far more suited to the transmission of myth than either poetry or prose because its images can reproduce physical reality at the same time that they are larger than life; because, like myths, dreams, and fairy tales, film can move fluidly through time and space and shift emotional tones just as fluidly; and because, even as myth exists both outside and inside history and arrives at universals through particulars, so does the cinema transcend a national language of words by means of the international language of images and transform the reality of those images into an iconography of the human psyche. In your view, which films treated in *Required Screening* are the most mythic—and the least?

23. Which artistic form do you prefer more, the theater or the cinema, and why?

24. Choose one of the following statements and defend it: (1) violent films tend to create violent tendencies in spectators who habitually view them; (2) violent films tend to purge the violent tendencies of spectators who habitually view them.

25. Compare and contrast the following three war films: *Apocalypse Now*, *Breaker Morant*, and *To Be or Not to Be*.

26. Describe the function of "telescoping" (setting a film's action in the past but intending that action as a comment upon the world of the present, outside the film at the time it was made) in three of the following five works: *Battleship Potemkin*, *The Gold Rush*, *Rashomon*, *Jules and Jim*, and *Breaker Morant*.

27. In what sense is film an art? What is the "language" of film art? Who is the artist behind an individual film?

28. Any writer's film criticism is, should be, and cannot help but be subjective—that is, subject to alteration over time in its judgments or opinions. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why? Is the quality of film criticism itself in decline, now that anyone and everyone can become a film critic by publishing his or her work, without editorial control, on the Internet? Or will film criticism ultimately be enriched by its democratic, "immediate" practice online?

29. How do audiences react to and interpret what they see on the screen? Are filmgoers actually shaped by what they see, or do they do the shaping themselves, through the expression of their movie preferences at the box office?

30. Charlton Heston once said, "The trouble with film as a business is that it's an art. The trouble with film as an art is that it's a business." Explain how this contradiction affects the making of movies.

31. Compare and contrast the happy endings of *The Last Laugh*, *The Gold Rush*, and *To Be or Not to Be* for their formal as well as thematic appropriateness.

32. The French director Robert Bresson once said, "The soundtrack invented silence." Choose a scene or sequence from the following two films—*La notte* and *Winter Light*—and discuss how, in each instance, the narrative is developed, if not in silence, then without, or almost without, dialogue. That is, discuss how the story is told in these excerpts more through cinematic means—images and sound—than through words.

33. The classical Hollywood editing style, unlike that of *Battleship Potemkin*, seeks to be "invisible." What does this mean? Describe the characteristics of the "invisible" style of Hollywood filmmaking. Your response should include references to stylistic features such as *mise-en-scène* and editing.

34. The Hollywood studio system—developed in the 1910s and 1920s from the industrial model created by Henry Ford—helped American film art to develop but it also hindered that art's development. Discuss those aspects of the system that helped the development of film art and those aspects that hindered it.

35. Since the cinema is defined by technology, it has always been influenced by technological changes and will continue to be influenced by them. What are some of these technological changes, and what impact do you think they had on past films, are having on film now, and will have on future films as well?

36. What makes a filmmaker independent? Can a filmmaker be truly independent? Provide examples of filmmakers and their films that you believe to be "independent."

37. A number of older black-and-white films have undergone a digital process called colorization. The people who have done this claim that colorization increases audience enjoyment of the films, while colorization's critics claim that it damages audience appreciation. What is your view, and why?

38. Discuss the philosophical concept of existentialism—the idea that the individual is a free and responsible agent determining his or her own development through acts of the will—as it applies to the major characters of *Rashomon* and *Jules and Jim*, being sure at the same time to describe the historical moment out of which each film arises.

39. Compare and contrast the flashback structures of *Daybreak*, *Rashomon*, and *Breaker Morant*.

40. Construct an eclectic or all-embracing theory of film (as opposed to a narrowly realistic, formalistic, or politicized one) that would allow for any motion picture of artistic quality, no matter what its form, style, or content.

41. Choose two of the following six descriptive phrases and discuss the extent to which they are helpful in analyzing and understanding film art, and the

extent to which such phrases are restrictive, reductive, or even distortive. The phrases are: Classical Hollywood Cinema; German Expressionism; Russian Formalism; French Poetic Realism; French New Wave; and New Australian Cinema.

42. The critic Vernon Young once said, "Film criticism can usually afford to disregard actors in a film's total effect." Orson Welles himself once wrote, "I don't understand how movies exist independently of the actor—I truly don't." With which man do you concur and why?

43. Agree or disagree with the following statement by the scholar Roger Manvell: "Film scripts are frequently published, but it is evident that very few of them can rank as literature."

44. What is self-reflexivity or self-reference in the cinema? To what extent is it embodied in *8½* and *Memories of Underdevelopment*, and what artistic purpose does such a device serve in each of these films?

45. Compare and contrast *Battleship Potemkin* and *Memories of Underdevelopment* as films of communist (post-)revolution.

46. Satyajit Ray was drawn into filmmaking, in part, after viewing Vittorio De Sica's Italian neorealist film *Bicycle Thieves* (1948) during a visit to London. To what extent—in style, theme, and production—does Ray's *Pather Panchali* show the effects of neorealistic influence?

47. Discuss the extent to which *The Blue Angel* and *Jules and Jim* can be called vile or subversive films, as opposed to ameliorative, socially constructive works of art.

48. Discuss the extent to which *Breaker Morant* may be considered, on the one hand, a melodrama in which the line between good and evil is clearly drawn, or, on the other hand, a complex tale in which neither side is completely virtuous or completely villainous.

## Basic Film Terms

**Aerial shot.** A shot from above, usually made from a plane, helicopter, or crane.

**Ambient sound.** Sound that emanates from the ambience (or background) of the setting or environment being filmed.

**Art director.** The person responsible for a film's set design, color scheme, and graphics. Also known as "production designer."

**Art houses.** Small theaters that sprang up in the major cities of the United States during the 1950s to show "art films" as opposed to "commercial movies."

**Aspect ratio**. The relationship between the frame's two dimensions: the width of the image to its height.

**Associative editing.** The cutting together of shots to establish their metaphoric or symbolic—as opposed to their narrative—relationship.

**Asynchronous sound.** Sound that does not have its source in the film image.

*Auteur*. A director or other creative intelligence with a recognizable and distinctive style who is considered the prime "author" of a film.

**Available lighting.** The use of only that light which actually exists on location, either natural (the sun) or artificial (household lamps).

**Back-lighting.** Lighting in which the main source of illumination is directed towards the camera, thus tending to throw the subject into silhouette.

**Bird's-eye view.** A shot in which the camera photographs a scene from directly overhead.

**Blocking.** Physical and spatial relationships among figures and settings in the frame.

**Cinematographer.** The director of photography, who is responsible for the camera technique and the lighting of the film in production.

**Close-up.** A detailed view of a person or object, usually without much context provided.

**Continuity.** The kind of logic implied in the association of ideas between edited shots. "Cutting to continuity" emphasizes smooth transitions between shots,

in which space and time are unobtrusively condensed. "Classical cutting" emphasizes dramatic or emotional logic between shots rather than one based strictly on considerations of time and space. In "thematic montage" the continuity is based entirely on ideas, irrespective of literal time and space. In some instances, "continuity" refers to the space-time continuum of reality before it is photographed.

**Contrapuntal sound.** Sound that counterpoints, or contrasts with, the image.

**Crane shot.** A shot taken from a special device called a crane, which resembles a huge mechanical arm. The crane carries the camera and cameraman, and can move in virtually any direction.

**Cross-cutting.** The alternating of shots from two sequences, often in different locales, to suggest that the sequences are taking place simultaneously.

**Cut.** A direct change from one shot to another, i.e., the precise point at which shot A ends and shot B begins.

**Dailies, or rushes.** Synchronized picture/sound workprints of a day's shooting that can be studied by the director, editor, and other crew members before the next day's shooting begins.

**Deep focus, or depth of field.** A technique of photography that permits all distance planes to remain clearly in focus, from close-up range to infinity.

**Dialectical montage.** A form of editing pioneered by the Soviet film theorist and filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein, in which shots "collide" or noticeably conflict with each other. Editing of this kind is based on the Marxist concept of dialectical materialism, which posits the history of human society as the history of the struggle between the classes. Also known as "intellectual montage."

**Digital effects.** Effects created directly by the use of computer imaging, so that the actual film image is generated or manipulated by computer software. Also known as CGI (computer-generated imagery).

**Direct sound.** Sound effects, conversations, music, or noise recorded simultaneously as the film is being shot.

**Dissolve, or lap dissolve.** These terms refer to the slow fading out of one shot and the gradual fading in of its successor, with a superimposition of images, usually at the midpoint.

**Dolly shot, tracking shot, or traveling shot.** A shot taken from a moving vehicle. Originally tracks were laid on the set to permit a smoother movement of the camera.

**Double exposure.** A special effect in which one shot is superimposed over another; may be expanded to a multiple-exposure.

**Dubbing.** The addition of sound after the visuals have been photographed. Also called postsynchronization.

**Editing.** The joining of one shot (strip of film) with another. The shots can picture events and objects in different places at different times. Editing is sometimes also called montage.

**Editor.** The person who supervises the cutting or splicing together of the shots of a film into their final structure.

**Establishing shot.** Usually a long shot or extreme long shot offered at the beginning of a scene or sequence and providing the viewer with the context of the subsequent closer shots. Also known as "master shot."

**External sound.** A form of sound that comes from a place within the film's narrative, which we and the characters in the scene hear but whose source we do not see.

**Extreme close-up.** A minutely detailed view of an object or a person. An extreme close-up of an actor generally includes only his eyes or mouth.

**Extreme long shot.** A panoramic view of an exterior location photographed from a great distance, often as far as a quarter of a mile away.

**Eye-level shot.** The placement of the camera approximately five to six feet from the ground, corresponding to the height of an observer on the scene and implying neutrality with respect to the camera's attitude toward the subject being photographed.

**Fade.** A fade-in occurs when a dark screen gradually brightens to reveal a shot. A fade-out occurs when a shot gradually darkens to become a black screen.

**Fast motion.** Photography that accelerates action by photographing it at a filming rate less than the normal twenty-four frames-per-second and then projecting it at normal speed, so that it takes place cinematically at a more rapid rate.

**Feature.** The main film in a program of several films, or any film over four reels in length. Standard theatrical feature length is 90 to 120 minutes.

***Film noir.*** Literally, "black film," a French term for films, beginning in the 1940s, that share certain "dark" characteristics such as sordid urban atmospheres,

low-key lighting, actual nighttime shooting, shady characters, and plots dealing with illicit passions and violent crimes.

**Filmography.** A listing of films, their directors, and their dates; similar to a bibliography.

**Final cut.** The final edited version of a film, created by mixing soundtracks, inserting the desired optical or special effects, fine-tuning the movie's rhythm, balancing small details and the bigger picture, bringing out subtleties and masking flaws, and approving the fidelity and acoustic quality of the mixed sound.

**Fish-eye lens.** An extreme wide-angle lens, which distorts the image so radically that the edges seem wrapped into a sphere.

**Flashback.** An editing technique that suggests the interruption of the present by a shot or series of shots representing the past.

**Flash-forward.** An editing technique that suggests the interruption of the present by a shot or series of shots representing the future.

**Frame.** The smallest compositional unit of film structure, the frame is the individual photographic image both in projection and on the film strip. This term also designates the boundaries of the image as an anchor for the visual composition.

**Freeze frame.** An optical effect in which action appears to come to a dead stop, achieved by printing a single frame of motion-picture film many times in succession.

**Full shot.** A type of long shot that includes the human body in full, with the head near the top of the frame and the feet near the bottom.

**Handheld shot.** A shot in which the cameraman holds the camera and moves through space while filming.

**High-angle shot.** A shot in which the subject is photographed from above.

**High-key lighting.** Lighting that results in more light areas than shadows; subjects are seen in middle grays and highlights, with little contrast.

**In-camera effects.** One category of special effects. This kind is created in the regular or production camera on the original negative and includes such effects as the dolly zoom and split screen.

**Iris shot.** The expansion or contraction of a small circle within the darkened frame to open or close a shot or scene.

**Jump cut.** A cut that jumps forward within a single action, thus creating a sense of discontinuity on account of the temporal ellipsis.

**Long shot.** Includes an amount of picture within the frame that roughly corresponds to the audience's view of the area within the proscenium arch in the live theater.

**Long take.** A shot of lengthy duration, sometimes called a sequence shot.

**Loose framing.** Usually found in full-to-long shots. The *mise-en-scène* is so spaciously distributed that the subject photographed has considerable latitude of movement.

**Low-angle shot.** A shot in which the subject is photographed from below.

**Low-key lighting.** Lighting that puts most of the set in shadow and uses just a few highlights to define the subject.

**Match cut.** A cut that links two different shots through continuous sound or action.

**Matte shot.** A shot that is partially opaque in the frame area so that it can be printed together with another frame, masking unwanted content and allowing for the addition of another scene on a reverse matte. In a "traveling matte shot" the contours of the opaque areas can be varied from frame to frame.

**Medium shot.** A relatively close shot, revealing a moderate amount of detail. A medium shot of a figure generally includes the body from the knees or waist up.

***Metteur-en-scène.*** Term used in *auteur* theory to describe a director who is technically competent but whose work does not possess the broader thematic, aesthetic, and psychological dimensions of the *auteur*.

***Mise-en-scène.*** The arrangement of objects, figures, and masses within a given space. In the cinema, that space is defined by the frame; in the live theater, usually by the proscenium arch. *Mise-en-scène* includes all the means available to a film director to express his attitude toward his subject. This takes in the placement of the actors in the setting or décor, their costumes and make-up, the angle and distance of the camera, camera movement as well as movement within the frame, the lighting, the pattern of color, and even the editing or cutting.

**Mixing.** The work of the sound editor, who refines, balances, and combines different soundtracks.

**Montage.** Transitional sequences of rapidly edited images, used to suggest the lapse of time or the passing of events. Often employs dissolves and multiple exposures.

**Negative.** A photographic image on transparent material in which light and dark shades are inverted; makes possible the reproduction of the image.

**Negative space.** Empty or unfilled space in the *mise-en-scène*, often acting as a foil to the more detailed elements in a shot.

**Oblique angle.** A shot that is photographed by a tilted, as opposed to horizontal, camera. When the image is projected on the screen, the subject itself seems to be tilted on its side, thus giving the viewer the impression that the world in the frame is out of balance. Also known as "Dutch angle" or "canted framing."

**Omniscient point of view.** The most basic and common point of view in the cinema. "Omniscient" means "all-knowing," and in film, the camera has complete or unlimited perception of events. The camera thus can maintain the status of an all-knowing observer even as it presents various restricted perspectives as the narrative evolves.

**180-degree system.** The fundamental means by which filmmakers maintain consistent screen direction, orienting the viewer and ensuring a sense of the cinematic space in which the action occurs. The system assures two things: the action within a scene will always advance along a straight line, either from left to right or from the right to the left of the frame; and the camera will remain consistently on one side of the action. Also known as the "180-degree rule," "the axis of action," and the "center line."

**Outtakes.** Material not used in the final cut of a film that is catalogued and saved.

**Overexposure.** Occurs when too much light enters the aperture of a camera lens, bleaching out the image.

**Over-the-shoulder shot.** A medium shot, useful in dialogue scenes, in which one actor is photographed head-on from over the shoulder of another actor.

**Pan.** A camera movement during which the body of the camera, which is otherwise stationary, turns to the left or right on its own axis. Onscreen this produces a mobile framing, or a constant re-framing, that scans the space horizontally.

**Parallel action.** A device of narrative construction in which the development of two pieces of action is presented alternately so as to suggest that they are occurring simultaneously.

**Persistence of vision.** Often called the physiological foundation of the cinema: an image remains on the retina of the eye for a short period of time after it disappears from the actual field of vision; when a successive image replaces it immediately, as on a moving strip of film, the illusion of continuous motion is produced.

**Point-of-view shot.** Any shot that is taken from the vantage point of a character in the film, showing what the character sees.

**Process shot, or rear projection.** A technique in which a background scene is projected onto a translucent screen behind the actors in the studio, so that it appears the actors are being photographed on location in the final image.

**Pull-back dolly.** A technique used to surprise the viewer by withdrawing from a scene to reveal an object or character that was previously out of the frame.

**Rack focusing, or selective focusing.** The changing of focus from one subject to another during a shot, guiding the audience's attention to a new, sharply delineated point of interest while the previous one blurs.

**Reaction shot.** A cut to a shot of a character's reaction to the contents of the preceding shot.

**Reverse-angle shot.** A shot taken from an angle 180° opposed to the previous shot—that is, the camera is placed opposite its previous position.

**Reverse motion.** Shooting a subject so that the action runs backward—achieved by running the camera itself backwards (spooling the film from bottom to top rather than from top to bottom); by turning the camera upside down (so long as the film is double-sprocketed) and then turning the processed film end over end; or by running the film backward through an optical printer.

**Score.** The musical soundtrack for a film.

**Scene.** A complete unit of film plot composed of one shot or a number of interrelated shots, unified usually by a central concern—a location, an incident, or a minor dramatic climax.

**Screen test.** A short filming undertaken by an actor who is trying out for a particular role.

**Sequence.** A series of shots or scenes joined in such a way that they constitute a significant part of a film's dramatic structure.

**Setup.** One camera position and everything associated with it. While the shot is the basic building block of a film, the setup is the basic component of the film's production.

**Shallow focus.** A shot in which only objects and persons in the foreground of the image can be seen clearly.

**Shot.** Those images that are recorded continuously from the time the camera starts to the time it stops: that is, an unedited, uncut strip of film. The shot is the basic signifying unit of film structure.

**Slow motion.** Shots of a subject photographed at a faster rate than twenty-four frames-per-second, which, when projected at the standard rate, produce a dreamy, dancelike slowness of action.

**Soft focus.** A visual effect in which the image seems somewhat hazy and not sharply defined, achieved by shooting with the lens slightly out of focus or shooting through a special lens, filter, or gauze.

**Sound bridge.** Sound carried from a first shot over to the next before the sound of that second shot begins. Also known as "sound transition."

**Sound design.** A concept combining the crafts of editing and mixing and representing advocacy for movie sound (to counter people's tendency to favor the movie image).

**Special effects.** A term used to describe a range of synthetic processes used to enhance or manipulate the filmic image. They include optical effects such as rear projection; mechanical or physical effects such as explosions or fires; makeup effects such as the use of blood bags and prosthetics; and digital effects.

**Split screen.** A visual composition in which the frame is divided into two separate images not superimposed over one another.

**Still.** A photograph that re-creates a scene from a film for publicity purposes, or a single-frame enlargement from a film that looks like a photograph.

**Stop-motion photography.** A technique used for trick photography and special effects in which one frame is exposed at a time so that the subject can be adjusted between frames.

**Subtext.** A term used in drama and film to signify the dramatic implications beneath the language of a play or movie. Often the subtext concerns ideas and emotions that are totally independent of the language of a script.

**Subjective shot, or subjective camera.** A shot that represents the point of view of a character. Often a reverse-angle shot, preceded by a shot of the character.

**Superimposition.** The simultaneous appearance of two or more images over one another in the same frame.

**Swish pan.** A shot in which the camera pans, or moves horizontally, so fast that the image is blurred. Also known as "zip pan."

**Synchronous sound.** Sound that has its source in the film image, where it is clearly identified.

**Take.** A director shoots one or more versions of each shot in a given setup, only one of which appears in the final version of the film; each of these versions is a take.

**Telephoto lens, or long lens.** A lens that acts as a telescope, magnifying the size of objects at a great distance. A significant side effect is its tendency to flatten perspective.

**Tight framing.** Usually in close shots. The *mise-en-scène* is so carefully balanced and harmonized that the subject photographed has little or no freedom of movement.

**Tilt.** The vertical movement of the camera from a stationary position—for example, resting on a tripod.

**Two-reeler.** A film running 30 minutes, the standard length of early silent comedies.

**Two-shot.** A medium shot, featuring two actors.

**Viewfinder.** On a camera, the small window through which one looks when taking a picture: the frame indicates the boundaries of the camera's point of view.

**Voice-over.** Commentary on the soundtrack by an unseen character or narrator.

**Wide-angle lens, or short lens.** A lens that permits the camera to photograph a wider area than a normal lens. A significant side effect is its tendency to exaggerate perspective. Also used for deep-focus photography.

**Wipe.** An editing device, usually a line that travels across the screen, "pushing off" one image and revealing another.

**Zoom lens/shot.** A lens of variable focal length that permits the cameraman to change from wide-angle to telephoto shots (and vice versa) in one continuous movement. The lens changes focal length in such a way during a zoom shot that a dolly or crane shot is suggested.

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Written with college and university students in mind, the essays in R. J. Cardullo's *Required Screening: Fifteen Must-See Films for the Art-House Connoisseur, 1924–1980* cover some of the central films treated—and central issues raised—in today's cinema courses and provide students with practical models to help them improve their own writing and analytical skills. *Required Screening* is aimed not only at students, however: it is also directed at teachers and cinephiles with an interest in world cinema in particular and cinema studies in general, as well as at those educated or cultured readers with an interest in the practice of film analysis and criticism.

This casebook is geographically diverse, with ten countries represented: Germany, Russia, the United States, France, Italy, Sweden, Japan, India, Cuba, and Australia. Among the films and directors treated are *Battleship Potemkin, Rashomon*, Truffaut, Fellini, *Apocalypse Now, The Blue Angel*, Bergman, Satyajit Ray, *La notte, Memories of Underdevelopment*, Chaplin, and Murnau. Moreover, the essays in *Required Screening* are clear and readable—that is, sophisticated and meaty yet not overly technical or jargon-heavy. This makes them perfect introductions to their respective films as well as important contributions to the field of film studies in general. In addition, the book's critical apparatus features credits, images, bibliographies for all films discussed as well as a general bibliography, filmographies for all the directors, a glossary of film terms, a guide to film analysis, and a list of topics for writing and discussion, together with a thoroughgoing index.

**R. J. Cardullo** has had his work appear in such journals as *Film Quarterly, Cinema Journal*, and the *Hudson Review*. He is the author or editor of a number of books, including *In Search of Cinema: Writings on International Film Art, Playing to the Camera: Film Actors Discuss Their Craft*, and *Stage and Screen: Adaptation Theory from 1916 to 2000*. He is also the chief American translator of the film criticism of André Bazin. He took his master's and doctoral degrees at Yale and taught for four decades at the University of Michigan, Colgate, and NYU, as well as abroad.